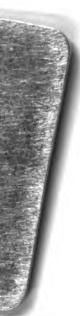

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MEDITATIONS

FOR EACH DAY FROM

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

TO

SEPTUAGESIMA,

(INCLUSIVE,)

BEING PART I.

OF

MEDITATIONS FOR EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR.


BY THE REV. P. NOUET.

DUBLIN:

J. BROWNE, 36, NASSAU-STREET,

AND MAY BE HAD OF ALL CATHOLIC BOOKSELLERS, AND AT
THE CONVENTS OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY.

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MEDITATIONS
ON THE HIDDEN
LIFE OF OUR LORD,

COMMENCING WITH
THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT,
AND TERMINATING WITH
SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

Translated from the French,
AND PUBLISHED FOR
THE BENEFIT OF THE SICK POOR
VISITED BY
THE SISTERS OF CHARITY.

DUBLIN:
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1842.



42.
11. 26.
1.

To
THE MOTHER OF THE INCARNATE WORD,
The great Model of the contemplative,
as well as of the active life,
Who, whilst she so perfectly and so lovingly discharged all the
external duties
which she owed to her Divine Son,
Kept all the words she had heard respecting Him,
pondering them in her heart ;
Who not only presented the Eternal Truth to the senses
and the homage of man,
But is also the most powerful agent for making Him internally
known ;
And who, as the Mother of holy love,
is our best Instructress,
As well as our most efficient Advocate,
in the hour of meditation,
This Volume is most humbly offered,
As a testimony of profound reverence, gratitude, and love,
By her devoted, though most unworthy client,
THE TRANSLATOR.

PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH the pretensions of the following translation are of too humble a character to demand a formal introduction, the manner in which it has been executed may require some explanation. It presents, for the first time, in an English dress, a selection of Meditations for Advent, extracted from the large work of the Rev. J. NOUET, S. J., written originally in French, and containing a series of considerations adapted to every day in the year. It is generally admitted by all who are conversant with spiritual life, that the best book of Meditations is that which presents, in a concise form, such a familiar digest of the Gospel truths, as may be equally adapted to the understanding and the heart, combining what is touching in sentiment with what is practical for the reformation of conduct. Although among the works of this nature which our language contains, there are some which appear to unite these qualities to a certain extent, it always appeared to the

translator, that we wanted something still more efficient to promote the practice of this important spiritual exercise—a work which may not only stimulate the mind to reflection, but give to reflection itself that practical direction which may be felt in the details of conduct. Among the continental writers who have devoted themselves to this department, the author of the following *Meditations*, whose character as a spiritualist stands so deservedly high, seemed to approximate most to the model which the translator had in contemplation. Yet in transfusing his *Meditations* into another language, and adapting them to a people of a different temperament, it was found necessary to take considerable liberty with the original. It was deemed expedient not only to select from the great variety which the author presented, but also to modify and abridge, sometimes to curtail or omit, what appeared too exuberant in point of imagination, and not unfrequently to supply an expression or sentence calculated to give a more full developement, or a more practical tendency to the moral. Although designed at first for the use of a small religious community, it appeared to the translator, that notwithstanding the deficiencies of the present English version, the work might be found serviceable in a larger sphere of utility, and might be used with advantage either by religious or seculars. Should this portion of the work meet with adequate encouragement, it will be followed by the remaining

part of the series, to complete the meditations for the year.*

Could the translator indulge the hope, that this little volume would serve, even in a slight degree, to promote the practice of meditation, induce those who are strangers to that most salutary spiritual exercise, to make the all-important business of salvation the subject of their serious and habitual reflection, or excite those who have already adopted it, to cultivate with still greater assiduity and diligence a practice which tends so powerfully to secure their eternal happiness, it would not only amply repay the trouble incurred in the execution of the work, but stimulate to other and more extensive efforts for the promotion of the same object.

* Whilst preparing these pages for the press, the translator met with an English version of *PÈRE NOUET's Meditations on the Passion*, published by Jones, London. It is only right to mention, that the editor of these sheets had translated the same reverend author's *Meditations for Lent*, early in the present year, without being aware of the existence of the work above alluded to. As this translation will probably be published at a future period, as a portion of the entire series, the editor deems it due to both parties, to give an explanation which may prevent either from assuming the merits or demerits of the other.

FIRST WEEK IN ADVENT.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

*On the Necessity of preparing the Heart by Penance
for the coming of Jesus Christ.*

1st POINT. Consider—"as many as received him, he gave them power to be made the Sons of God, to them that believe in his name who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* Jesus Christ enters into the world to destroy sin; therefore, if you desire to receive him, you must, according to Saint Augustin, search the foldings of your soul, that you may discover if any secret sin, which could wound the eyes of his divine Majesty, lie hid in the depth of your conscience. When the unfortunate Achem violated the prohibition given to the armies of Israel, God said in his wrath to the people: I will not dwell amongst you, till you destroy him who is guilty of this wickedness. Consider these words as addressed from heaven to yourself. Listen to our Lord, who says, "I will not enter into your heart, until you have destroyed sin therein; I cannot dwell with pride, envy, or disobedience."

O my God! how great is thy hatred of sin, yet how great thy goodness towards the sinner! Thou art

* S. John, i.

satisfied when he acknowledgeth his fault with humility. Therefore "I said, I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord, and thou hast forgiven the impiety of my sin."

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus Christ enters into the world to bring peace to men of good will. You must therefore banish all disquietude from your soul, if you desire to receive him. He is the God of peace, you must offer him a pacific victim, immolating your desires, your cares, your impetuosity, on the altar of your heart, and retire within yourself by recollection; otherwise it is to be feared that you will be like unto the Bethlehemites, among whom he found only a stable instead of a temple or a royal mansion. Remember that the altar on which the victims were immolated in the temple of Jerusalem, was hollow, and that the heart on which you should offer the sacrifice of your tears and vows, should be emptied of all inordinate affections, to receive Jesus Christ therein.

O King of peace, come thyself to calm the trouble of my heart, that it may become thy dwelling place. Happy are they who desire nothing but thy love! They have found the only true happiness on earth: for beside thee there is nothing that can fill the heart of man.

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus Christ enters into the world to establish the law of the spirit, and engrave it in our hearts. Consequently, if you desire that he enter into yours, you must banish thence all that is carnal and sensual. For the life of the spirit and that

of the flesh are incompatible. The Apostle says,—
“For the law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath delivered me from the law of sin and of death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh; God sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and of sin, hath condemned sin in the flesh.” That is to say, by the flesh of Jesus Christ made a holocaust for sin, and bearing its resemblance; “that the justification of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. For they that are according to the flesh, mind the things that are of the flesh; but they that are according to the spirit, mind the things that are of the spirit. For the wisdom of the flesh is death; but the wisdom of the spirit is life and peace. Because the wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be. And they who are in the flesh, cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”.....For whosoever are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

MONDAY.

On the mission of the Angel Gabriel to Nazareth.

1st POINT. Consider—the province of Galilee being the nearest to the country of the Gentiles, it was

* S. Paul, Rom. viii.

in this province that Jesus would assume our nature, to teach us that he came for the salvation of all men, without distinction of Jew or Gentile. It was there also that he assembled his disciples before ascending into heaven, to assure us that he went to take possession of it in the name of all, and that no one should be excluded unless through his own fault. O ineffable consolation! Those gates of Heaven which appeared in the vision of the beloved disciple corresponding to the four quarters of the globe, are now thrown open to us. Let us hasten, O my soul, to enter by one of these doors; death shall close them for ever to the impenitent sinner. Let not tepidity prevent thee, or cause thee to hear at the hour of thy decease these dreadful words—"The door is shut."*

2nd POINT. Consider—the city of Nazareth was the least considerable of Galilee, whence Nathaniel understanding that Jesus was a Nazarean, said with surprise,—“Can anything good come from Nazareth.”† Admire the humility of the Son of God, who begins so early to practise that which he is afterwards to teach, viz.—to choose always the lowest place. The Son of God has particularly honored four places on earth—Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Rome. His humility appeared in choosing the first, his poverty in the second, his patience in the third, and the last named is the dwelling place of faith, and the immutable seat of the religion which he has established. Love these four virtues, begin with the lowliest which is humility, if you desire that Jesus enter into your heart.

* S. Matt. xxv.

† S. John, i. 46.

3rd POINT. Consider—how great the veneration due to the dwelling of the Blessed Virgin, wherein was wrought the greatest of all miracles; a dwelling doubly holy, as being sanctified by the birth of the purest of all creatures, and by the incarnation of the Holy of Holies. Unite yourself with all the devout servants of Jesus and Mary, to visit and honor in spirit that blessed mansion, to present the vows and oblations of your heart and lips, to participate in the prayers and good works there offered, to give thanks to God for the mercies he has shed upon it, and to obtain an increase of these graces for yourself in particular, as well as for all the faithful.

TUESDAY.

The Salutation of the Angel.

1st POINT. Consider—what was the disposition of the Blessed Virgin, when the angel saluted her. It was already midnight; and yet St. Bernard says she still watched in prayer. When Saint Gabriel appeared to Zachary, the Scripture remarks that he was offering incense; and when he came to the Blessed Virgin, he found her in prayer. The angels, though not visible, are not less present and favorable to us in prayer. Who can conceive the lights, the graces, the holy desires, the ardours of divine love, the heroic acts of virtue the Holy Ghost produced in the heart of his spouse, to dispose her for this mystery? How powerfully must not all the faculties of Mary's soul, and all the virtues by which she was adorned, have been excited and elicited at the approach of the Divine Word!

Her humility was profound even to annihilation, her charity was exalted above the heavens, her heart was all fire, and her mind filled with the rays of the Sun of Justice, who came to enlighten the darkness of the world.

Oh my soul, how powerful is prayer to attract the benedictions of heaven, when it is accompanied by humility, confidence, and love.

2nd POINT. Consider—how the angel enters the chamber of the Blessed Virgin, the doors being shut; imagine the modesty, humility, and profound respect that appear in the countenance of this divine messenger, who comes to announce the descent of a God upon earth, to her whom He had chosen for His Mother. Learn hence what your comportment should be, when you present yourself before God in prayer, or when you supplicate the holy Virgin. Beware of ever failing in respect in presence of him before whom the seraphims tremble, and who punishes severely the slightest faults that even his just servants commit, contrary to the reverence due to his infinite greatness.

3rd POINT. Consider—the praises with which the angel salutes the Blessed Virgin, before declaring to her the subject of his embassy—“Hail, full of grace,”* by a plenitude as transcendent as it is peculiar. The Lord is with thee in love, thought, and action, but He will soon be with thee as the child of thy womb. Blessed art thou amongst women on account of thy singular prerogatives, and particularly that of thy

* S. Luke, i. 28.

future maternity. O Blessed Virgin, accept the homage that I render thee, with the angel, in honor of these three privileges, which are the true sources of thy joy. I rejoice in the plenitude of grace with which thou hast been honored, and which enables thee to be so liberal to those who serve thee.

O most holy of all creatures! I ask thee not to obtain for me earthly goods, the favor or esteem of creatures, since thou hast taught me by thy example to despise all these; I only desire and esteem three things in this life: the grace of God, the presence of God, the benediction of God. Vouchsafe to obtain these for me, and I shall esteem myself rich indeed.

WEDNESDAY.

On the Alarm of the Blessed Virgin.

1st POINT. Consider—"Having heard him, she was troubled at his discourse."* The angel having saluted the Virgin in this strain of praise, paused in expectation of her reply; but she was silent, and was troubled at his words, and thought within herself what kind of salutation this might be. This trouble, says Saint Bernard, was not inordinate; she was troubled, but did not lose her presence of mind. This emotion did not prevent her from thinking what she ought to do, or examining the words of the angel; her surprise was not caused by the novelty of the apparition, for her ordinary and familiar conversation was with heaven and

* S. Luke, i. 29.

the angels. Saint Ambrose attributes this fear to her angelic purity, for hitherto her vision of angels had been intellectual, but in honor of and conformity to the mystery of the incarnation, Saint Gabriel had assumed a human form, and at this new form her virginal modesty is alarmed. O how precious, but how delicate is the flower of purity! a look, a word suffices to tarnish it: therefore chaste souls should continually distrust themselves, and fly the least occasions of danger.

2nd POINT. Consider—another cause of trouble, which marks still more the sanctity of the Blessed Virgin. Her profound humility could not suffer the praises or extraordinary respect rendered to her by the angel. There is no more solid mark of virtue, than to fly praise with the same care that worldings seek it. “A man is known by the praises that are given to him,” says the wise man, “as gold is proved in the furnace.”* A weak mind is easily caught by this poison: the saints, on the contrary, rejected it with horror; they feared it would be the recompense of the good which they effected through the grace of God. They considered honour as a forbidden fruit; which they could not gather without injustice, or taste without danger of death, seeing that the glory of their good works belongs to Jesus Christ. In fine, they knew that the judgment of the world is as fruitless as it is false, whereas our happiness absolutely depends on that of God, who often attaches his malediction to the benediction of men. Imitate the Blessed Virgin by carefully suppressing all vain complacency at your own

* Prov. xxvii.

praise : it will pass away and leave you nothing but bitterness. Do not seek to prolong by useless replies, or affected modesty, the discourse in which you are commended ; you should have recourse to silence for your defence. Do not lightly believe what is said in your favor, but listen to the voice of God, who says by the prophet Isaiah,—“ O my people, they who praise deceive thee, and turn thee from the true path of virtue and salvation : it is God who is to judge thee, and not man.”

3rd POINT. Consider—the angel, in order to calm the fear of the Blessed Virgin, calls her by her name. For the soul must be calm, in order to receive the divine impressions. Learn hence how necessary are peace of heart and tranquillity of mind, when you pray. For if even a just trouble is an obstacle to receiving the light of the Holy Ghost, how can it enter amid the tumult of irregular passions. Be not surprised if God and his angels rarely visit you ; and if their visits have little effect, it is because your heart is like a sea agitated by the winds. Your irregular desires, your fears, your inquietudes, render you incapable of the divine communications. If you desire that God should visit you in prayer, approach him with a heart undisturbed by passion. Have recourse to the Blessed Virgin, that she may obtain for you the peace so necessary for conversing with God, since through her is imparted the plenitude of grace that re-establishes peace between God and man.

THURSDAY.

The Annunciation of the Mystery of the Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—the happy news which the angel bears to the Blessed Virgin: “Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High.”* Thou hast already conceived him spiritually in thy heart by faith and love, thou shalt conceive him corporally by obedience, and the power of the Holy Ghost. Admire the happiness of the Blessed Virgin, in whom virginity and the divine maternity are united. Honor in her person these two singular prerogatives; salute her with profound respect, and remember that you can participate in her happiness: first, by conceiving Jesus Christ spiritually by faith and charity; secondly, by receiving him corporally in the holy communion. This conception and reception will operate in you a great purity, united with an abundant fruitfulness in all virtues, and will render you capable of bringing forth Jesus Christ, not only in yourself, but also in the hearts of many others. Remember it is not enough to conceive Jesus Christ, you must bring him forth; that is to say, it suffices not to form good desires, they must be reduced to practice by the exercise of good works.

2nd POINT. Consider—the angel reveals to the Blessed Virgin the name her son is to bear: first, because it belonged to God alone to impose a name on

* S. Luke, i. 31.

his only Son ; secondly, to give her to understand, by virtue of the name of Jesus, that God would give her not only a Son, but a Saviour. He gave him not for herself alone, but for the whole world. This demonstrates, that when God imparts to us any grace, he intends not merely our particular profit, but also that we should employ it for the salvation of our neighbour. Thirdly, to win her consent by the charm of this sweet name of Jesus, which undoubtedly excited in her heart the tenderest emotion, since it operates so powerfully even on the most obdurate. O who can tell the esteem that she felt for this sacred name, and her joy at the promised reparation of the world !

Holy Virgin, thou wert the first to hear this adorable name, and to engrave it in thy heart ; obtain for us from thy divine Son, that he may pass from thy heart into ours, to enlighten, console, fortify, and inflame them with his love.

3rd POINT. Consider—the eulogium of the angel on the incarnate Word. He shall be great—he has always been, as God, equal to his Father ; but he shall now be, as man, infinitely exalted above all created beings ; “ He shall be acknowledged Son of the Most High ;” * He shall possess the empire of the universe, figured by the throne of David ; “ And of his kingdom there shall be no end.” * O glorious kingdom, in which all shall be kings for eternity, where all shall glorify for ever the King of Kings, whose glory, reflected on his saints, shall make them as brilliant suns in the

* Luke, i. 31.

kingdom of his Father! O that Jesus would deign to number us "among his people," to deliver us from our sins!

Remember us, O Lord, according to the love thou bearest to thy people; visit us by thy salutary grace, that we may have part in thy triumph, and that thou mayest be praised by those who are thy inheritance. Take away, O Lord, all scandals out of thy kingdom, which is my soul, that thou mayest reign therein, for thou art my King and my God, who willest the salvation of Jacob.

FRIDAY.

On the Consent of the Blessed Virgin.

1st POINT. Consider—the words of the Blessed Virgin, "Behold the hand-maid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word."* How noble the faith of the Blessed Virgin! Can any thing be more elevated above our understandings, than the most holy Trinity, the incarnation of the Word, and the maternity of a virgin? These are, nevertheless, the object of her faith. Moreover *she* requires no miracle to induce her to believe in all these things. God promises Palestine to his servant Abraham: the father of the faithful demands a sign. Gideon receives a command on the part of God: at the same time he asks a sign. The angel promises Zachary that he shall have a son in his old age: he also demands "whence he shall know

* S. Luke, i.

this." But the Blessed Virgin, whose fidelity far transcended that of all creatures, asks no proof of the promise of God. In opening her understanding to the simple light of faith, she attracts to it the Sun of Justice himself, who enlightens her with his glory. O how much are we indebted to her! Well may we consider her as the model of faith! O sweet words—Behold the hand-maid of the Lord! O chaste turtle, whose voice announces the spring time of grace! may it, at the hour of our death, announce to us the summer of glory.

2nd POINT. Consider—the incarnate Word is the fruit of all the virtues of the Blessed Virgin; as will appear to you when you meditate these words—"Behold the hand-maid of the Lord." It is humility itself that speaks, and annihilates before God all that is in the creature. It is purity that opens its heart, to receive within it the lily of the valley. It is the voice of divine love, which the Holy Ghost breathes over this virginal earth, to produce the fruit of life. It is obedience speaks by the mouth of the Blessed Virgin, who offers herself for all the designs that God has over her, and associates herself to the labours, the pains, and the cross of her Son. In fine, be persuaded that whatever is most sublime in all the virtues, is here combined to enrich the sacrifice that she offers of her will to all the decrees of divine Providence; so that she may say to the Eternal Father, "My heart hath uttered a good word: to the glory of the King I consecrate all my works."* Thus you

* Psalm xliv.

ought to act, following her example; and as God sheds upon you the riches of his bounty, you should also draw forth from your heart whatever is most estimable, to make an oblation of it to his Son. And if there is nothing good to be found therein, at least draw forth all that is evil, and endeavour to destroy it, in order to become more agreeable to him.

3rd POINT. Consider—what is written of the valiant woman: “She considered a field, and she purchased it.”* What is this field, this fertile inheritance the Blessed Virgin purchases this day? It is the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ, united to the divine Word. What does she find in this field, after having made it the subject of her consideration; she finds much pain and suffering for the space of thirty-three years, and under those a great treasure hidden. What is the amount of the purchase? The purest blood of her heart, to form the precious flesh with which the divine Word shall clothe himself, in order to make war on the demon, and to destroy his empire. Ah what should we not give to purchase Jesus Christ? what is there in this world to be compared with him? And nevertheless, we refuse to yield up a point of honor, a trifling interest, a vain pleasure, a nothing for the possession of him. Whence comes this blindness? It is that we have not sufficiently considered the value of this evangelical field, and that we are ignorant of its worth.

O my Saviour! if men knew the treasures thou hidest in thy bosom, they would spare nothing to purchase thee.

* Prov. xxxi.

SATURDAY.

On the Virtues exercised by the Blessed Virgin in the Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—"Behold the hand-maid of the Lord."* Fidelity is a leading quality in a perfect servant. The fidelity of the Blessed Virgin is accompanied by an admirable wisdom. She first examines the message the angel bears; but soon as the order of God is declared to her, she faithfully corresponds with his will, reserving nothing to herself, giving all to God. She consecrates to obedience all the powers of her soul and body. Behold the faithful servant of the Lord: faithful in peril and in suffering, even to the cross; faithful in rendering to God all the glory of his own gifts, and attributing nothing to herself; faithful to execute in all things the divine will and counsels.

Dispose of me, O Lord, according to thy good pleasure; place me where thou wilt, it is thy glory to command, and mine to be faithful in executing. Is this the disposition of your soul? Are you faithful in all things? Faithful in employing the talents that God has bestowed, faithful in the trials that he sends, faithful in the accomplishment of his laws and counsels? If so, you shall one day hear from his lips those words of consolation,—“Good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful in few things, I will place thee over many. Enter into the joy of the Lord.”†

* S. Luke, i.

† S. Mark, xxv.

2nd POINT. Consider—the love of labor manifested by the Blessed Virgin. This virtue appears in the services rendered to the incarnate Word, in the journeys she undertook, and the exile she endured. She was never idle, but employed carefully every moment of time, to the glory of God, and in laboring for the support of her divine son. In this spirit she offers herself to God with promptitude, to be employed in the service of the infant she is to conceive, joyfully devoting all her powers to be consumed therein. Saint Ephrem remarks that in recompense she bore him without suffering, and brought him forth without pain. Learn hence that all the saints were lovers of labour. Do you desire to know whether Jesus Christ is the fruit of your obedience, as he was of that of the Blessed Virgin? Do you bear him without pain, and bring him forth without sorrow? In a word, do you labor generously? We are all equally born to labour on earth, and to reign in heaven. By the works of your hands you shall discover whether you be worthy of the crown.

3rd POINT. Consider—in the moment of the incarnation the promise of God is accomplished, and the immaculate Virgin crushes the head of the serpent. For as the incarnation of the Son of God depends on the word of the Virgin, she has no sooner uttered it, than the well-beloved of his Father descends from heaven, destroys the empire of darkness, crushes the head of the infernal serpent, and causes death itself to die.

O Virgin, stronger and more worthy of benediction than Judith, how great is thy glory, to have cut the

head of Holofernes by thy word, more piercing than the sword! How powerful is an act of obedience! It puts all the demons to flight, and triumphs over every vice.

SECOND SUNDAY.

On the Incarnation of the Eternal Word.

1st POINT. Consider—"The Word is made flesh."* As soon as the Blessed Virgin has given her consent, the Holy Ghost descends upon her, and by an incomprehensible miracle forms of her pure blood a most perfect body; he also creates a soul of incomparable beauty, and at the same instant the Word unites himself to this soul and body. He becomes the Man-God, the Blessed Virgin concurring to this great work in quality of mother. Although there is but one man who is God, nevertheless we all participate in this honor, and each of us may be united to the Word in quality of brother, friend, or spouse, provided we dispose ourselves for this union. Thus, the incarnation is the elevation of human nature to the divine, which is a dignity the most inconceivable. It was said to man in contempt—"Thou art dust;" and now it is said to him in honor—"Thou art God;" thou art the Son of the Most High, and heir presumptive of his crown. Is your life conformable to this glorious prerogative? Are your actions worthy of that divine filiation? Do not your desires, thoughts, words, and conduct, derogate from the title

* S. John, i.

of the child of God? Ah! if you follow your passions, if you live according to the flesh and the world, you may justly be reproached with being but dust and ashes.

2nd POINT. Consider—how the Blessed Virgin concurs to the completion of this mystery, and the honor it reflects on her. This quality of Mother of God, which is the source of her dignity, should also be the motive of the homage and service you render her; and as it gives her an admirable power over the person, the heart, and all the graces of her Son, it should also give her the same power over you and all that regards you. Examine if you honor her as Jesus Christ did whilst living here on earth; whether you obey her as he did, and allow her to dispose of your will, your inclinations, your honor, and your life. If you entertain not these sentiments for her, fear least she should not bear towards you the sentiments and tenderness of a mother.

3rd POINT. Consider—that he who is without a beginning in the bosom of the eternal Father, begins now a new life in the womb of his blessed mother. When shall he begin to live in you by a holy and perfect life? When shall you be able to glory, with Saint Paul, that you live no longer for yourself, but that Jesus Christ lives, and continues in you the life that he led on earth, viz.—a life of innocence, purity, and simplicity, in fine, a life of all the virtues? It is in your power to make him live so within you; and he desires nothing more. Be not so much your own enemy, as to neglect so excellent a life. Be not content with inducing him to

live in you, cause him to increase by prayer, spiritual lectures, the practice of mortification, and the exercise of good works, until you arrive at the plenitude of the age of Jesus Christ. Happy and blessed is he who, having Jesus living within him, can say in each thought and action, I live in the faith of the Son of God who has loved me, and delivered himself for me.

O Blessed Virgin, obtain for us this grace ; you, who have as truly conceived your divine Son in your heart as in your chaste womb, and who can say with the Eternal Father, "I have within me the source of life." Bring forth in us this dear Son, form within our hearts this source of life, undeterred by our unworthiness. The world was not worthy to receive him when you gave him birth. Consider the desire he has of assuming this new life in us, and that you cannot bear more gloriously the name of mother, than by producing him by a continual generation, so that you can say at each moment that you bring him forth in our hearts : "Thou art my Son ; this day have I begotten thee."

MONDAY.

The Perfections of the sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ.

1st POINT. Consider—the soul of Jesus as a sun whose elevation, strength, and light, transcend the faculties of angels and of men. This divine light discovers all things, penetrates the secrets of all hearts. Nevertheless its splendour remains hidden during his mortal

life; and while he converses with men, he manifests not his wisdom, his science, or the lights of his understanding. All is concealed under the veil of humility; or if some rays break forth, it is only to enlighten and instruct the poor, the simple, and the lowly: "I give thee thanks, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones. Yes, Father; for so it hath pleased thee."* Learn hence to prefer virtue to all human knowledge or natural gifts. Never value yourself for any supposed talent; if it be sometimes necessary to discover any acquirement you may possess, for the edification or utility of your neighbour, let it be with great modesty. Never dispute, or desire to triumph over the opinions of others. Employ willingly the talents God has bestowed on you in the instruction of the poor. Your merit will be greater, and the danger of vanity less. Happy is he who can say with Jesus Christ: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me. He hath sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart; to preach deliverance to the captive, and sight to the blind."†

2nd POINT. Consider—the sacred body of Jesus being the organ of his soul, necessarily participates in its sanctity and beatitude; but as the latter quality would render him incapable of suffering, and consequently of meriting the redemption of the world, he suspends, for that great object, the prerogative of beatitude, but not of sanctity, of which he was full even to

* S. Matt. xi. 25.

† S. Luke, iv. 18.

overflowing. Hence, though susceptible of suffering, his blessed soul is exempt from all resistance to the movements of the spirit. Admirable privilege, which should on one side fill us with joy and respect, if we love Jesus Christ; and on the other, cause us to deplore with Saint Paul the weakness, repugnance, and contradiction, which we experience on the part of the body, in the practice of virtue. Unhappy man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death—from the pressure of this burden? My soul, mortification will restore thee to the happy state of original innocence, if thou prove thyself fervent and persevering in its exercise.

3rd POINT. Consider—the sacred body of Jesus is the organ, not only of his soul, but also of his divinity, to which it is personally united. In this respect it possesses a divine virtue capable of operating miraculously on souls and bodies. His touch heals the leperous, his word chases away devils, his spittle restores sight to the blind, the hem of his garment gives health to the infirm, and his very look touches the hardened heart, and converts the sinner. Why has he not the same power over you? What change ought there to have been wrought in you, since you first had the happiness of receiving the holy communion? Whence comes it, that you are still the same, that is to say, weak in your resolutions, violent in your passions, unquiet and impetuous in your desires, inconsiderate in your words, rash in your undertakings, blind in your counsels and entire conduct?—Is it a want of faith? Is it a want of courage? Is it that you are too much pre-occupied by self-love?

TUESDAY.

Jesus in the first moments of his human life.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus beholding clearly the infinite goodness and sovereign beauty of God, is at the same time inflamed with the beatific love. This love attracts directly to God all the powers of his soul with an incomparable ardour and complacency ; so that we may say in this blessed moment, God began to be loved to the greatest possible extent. Rejoice that there is in the world one heart that loves God perfectly, and repairs the offences committed against him. Rejoice also, that this is a human heart like unto thine own ; honor the Blessed Virgin of whose pure blood it was formed ; but be confounded that your love is so unlike to his.

My sweet Saviour ! my consolation is, that you have given me your own heart to supply the weakness of mine. O God, sovereignly amiable, my heart being incapable of loving, allow me to offer thee that of thy beloved Son, and to implore one spark of the fire that consumes it, to purify and inflame mine.

2nd POINT. Consider—the love of Jesus tending towards God with all its force, extends at the same time to his works. He considers creatures as the property, the dependants, the subjects of God, and in this view he cannot but love them. True charity loves all that belongs to God and which is loved by Him, purely because he loves it. Is it thus you love your neighbour, your friends, your relatives ? Is it thus

you love yourself? Do you love nothing but for God? Do you love God in all things? Do you love all things in God? Your charity should have no bounds; it should embrace all, friends, enemies, relatives, strangers, the poor, the rich, adversity, prosperity, in a word whatever comes from God or belongs to him.

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus loving God sovereignly, and beholding his sacred humanity united to the Divinity, consequently loves all men as his brethren, ardently desiring for them every good, and above all their eternal salvation. His love is infinitely communicative: he associates us to all the good he possesses, and he participates in all our miseries. Imitate this admirable bounty; let charity pour back upon your neighbour the benefits you receive from God, and excite your sympathy for his suffering members. Be persuaded that charity gives a legitimate right over all that you possess, to those who are poor, and even over your life, to those who are in danger of their eternal salvation. Listen to these words of the Apostle,—“The charity of Jesus Christ presseth us.”* You can render nothing to the Son of God, because you have nothing but what you have received from him, and moreover he has no need of you, but he holds himself indebted for the good you procure your brethren. Be then charitable to them, if you would not be ungrateful towards him. Spare nothing to save them; whatever good you do them for his sake, you can do nothing comparable to what he has done for you.

* S. Paul, 2. Cor. v. 14.

WEDNESDAY.

Jesus in the first moments of his human life.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus beholding the sovereign excellence and infinite majesty of God, adores him with profound submission, as the creator and glorifier of his sacred humanity. This reverence with which the soul of Jesus is impressed towards his eternal Father, arises from the clear knowledge he possesses of his own nothingness as man. As his light surpasses that of all the saints, he better understands the distance between the Creator and the creature; and consequently descending more deeply into the nothingness of the latter, he exalts the divinity to which it is united. Learn hence that the knowledge of self contributes much to the glory of God. Therefore it is of much import to sound well your own nothingness and baseness. Dive deeply into this abyss: this knowledge is a rich treasure. When you arrive at its centre, you will there find God.

O sovereign majesty of God, grant that I may know thee and know myself. Thou art the abyss of being and of all good, as I am an abyss of nothingness and sin. Shall not pride and self-love be annihilated in this two-fold depth of all and of nothing?

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus knowing that the infinite greatness of God is worthy of all praise and benediction, employs both the lights of his understanding and the ardor of his heart to praise and bless him. He praises him by his works as well as by the affections

of his heart. The admirable life he now commences, is a praise as touching as it is effective. O how pleasing to the sanctity of God is a holy life! This is a solid good, whilst affections and sentiments are transitory. Every moment of such a life renders to God a rich tribute of honor; every action of it glorifies some of the divine attributes. Virginity honors the purity of his being; voluntary poverty, his independence and the inexhaustible treasure of his riches; obedience, his sovereign dominion; hope, his infinite power; love, his supreme goodness, which claims in a particular manner the homage of the heart. Reflect on yourself, and consider whether your life is not rather a contempt than a true praise of God. What glory do you render him by your actions? Is not your tepidity and irregularity a cause of scandal, whereas there is not a moment of your life, a sigh of your heart, a movement of your body, which should not praise God and lead others to praise him. "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall ever be in my mouth."

3rd POINT. Consider—the fervent thanksgiving the soul of Jesus offers to his eternal Father, beholding himself elevated to a union with the Divine Being, and enriched with so many graces: like a pure and bright mirror, he returns to its source all the light he receives from it. Who can conceive with what tenderness he says to his heavenly Father: "I give thee thanks, O Father. All that I have received belongeth to thee, and all that thou art belongeth to me."* Let this example fill you with confusion for your ingratitude to

* S. John, xi. 11.

God : had you any feeling of his goodness, could you be so cold in his service ? Could you abuse his gifts, and be so blind as to use against himself, the benefits conferred on you ? Why are you so destitute of the goods of heaven ? Because your ingratitude dries up their source : you forget God, and he forgets you ; you have no respect for him, and he has no tenderness for you : in a word, you are poor and miserable, because you are unmindful of the divine favors.

“ Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all that he hath done for thee ; who forgiveth all thy iniquities ; who healeth all thy diseases ; who redeemeth thy life from destruction ; who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion ; who satisfieth thy desire with good things.”*

THURSDAY.

On Jesus offering himself to his Father for the accomplishment of all his designs.

1st POINT. Consider—the soul of Jesus being replenished with the graces of the Holy Ghost, he suffers them not to remain inactive a single moment ; but makes an offering to his eternal Father, the most precious and pleasing that had ever been presented. To understand this, consider, in the first place, he offers *himself*, which is the greatest and richest of all gifts. Many offer to God their prayers, alms, fasts, and mortifications ; but few offer *themselves*, and make

* Psalm cii.

an oblation of their *hearts*. They always secretly reserve to themselves the disposal of their own will. This division is displeasing to God ; it is not the sacrifice of Abel, it is the sacrifice of Cain, who offered to God the fruits of the earth, but reserved to himself his heart and will, as Saint Augustine says. Act not thus towards your Master ; give your whole self to him ; say with the prophet Isaiah : “ O Lord my God, possess me, for I am thy creature, I acknowledge no other master but thee ;” or with David : “ O Lord, I give myself to thee, for I am thy slave, and the son of thy hand-maid.”*

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus makes an entire offering of himself, placing no limits to his obedience, but the good pleasure of his Father. Already he pronounces in secret that which he will one day express in the excess of his agony : “ My Father, dispose of me according to thy will, and not according to mine ;”† of which I make thee a sacrifice, having no desire but to please thee. Offer yourself in like manner for all the designs that God has over you. Say to him, with the prophet : “ Send me where thou wilt,”‡ I am ready for all things ; or with Saint Paul : “ What wilt thou that I do ?”§ or rather with Jesus Christ himself, at his entrance into the world : “ Behold me, I come to do thy will, O my God.”¶

3rd POINT. Consider—that Jesus offers himself generously, and with the most pure, holy, and perfect devotedness ; having no other view in this oblation,

* Psalm cxv. 16. † S. Matt. xxvi. 39. ‡ Isaias, vi. 8.
§ Acts, ix. 6. ¶ Heb. x. 9.

than to be entirely consumed for the glory of God and our salvation. Animate all you do for God with a like devotion. Let the fervour of your affection compensate for the meanness of your offering. Unite your heart to that of Jesus, your life to his, your insignificance to his grandeur: thus shall your sacrifice become of inestimable price.

O Lord my God, be thou eternally blessed; to thee belongs power and glory, to thee all praise is due. All that is in heaven or on earth is thine. Thou art the Lord of all things. Thou swayest the sceptre of the universe. Therefore I render thee profound homage, and devote myself to the glory of thy name. But who am I, my God, that I dare present this offering? All is thine, I can give nothing but what I have received from thee. I know, my God, simplicity of heart is acceptable to thee; therefore, in that spirit I joyfully present my offering: I have no greater satisfaction than to behold souls give themselves to thee without reserve. Preserve, O Lord, this affection of my heart, and grant that my profound veneration for thee may be ever unshaken.”*

FRIDAY.

On the Compassion of Jesus for our miseries.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus in the moment of his incarnation, extending his view over the past, the present, and the future, discovers the pitiable condition of

* Paral. xxix. 10.

mankind. Seeing on one side heaven closed, and on the other hell open to sinners, who by a frightful blindness precipitate themselves therein, he is touched with extreme compassion for their misery; so that from that moment it may be said of him: "Jesus beholding the multitude, had compassion on them, because they were weak, and dispersed like sheep without a pastor."* Rank yourself with those unhappy sinners, whose misfortune pierces the tender heart of your Saviour; say to him with sentiments of gratitude and love: O sweet Jesus, what is man, to deserve thy care? and why placest thou thy affections on him? It is the excess of thy ardent charity. If thou wert not infinitely merciful, wouldst thou deign to look upon a creature so mean and criminal as I am?

2nd POINT. Consider—amongst all the miseries of man, that which afflicts Jesus most, is sin. He considers it as an evil in some sort infinite, whether viewed as an offence to an infinite majesty, or as depriving man of an infinite good; and this consideration enkindles in his heart a zeal for the honour of God, that devours him, an inconceivable sorrow, and pressing desire for the destruction of sin, as well as an incomparable ardour to make his Father known to men, in order to draw them to his love. Are you thus sensible to the offences committed against God, and the loss of souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ? When you witness or hear of scandals or disorders in the world, does the sword of sorrow penetrate your inmost soul? Are you consumed with zeal for the honour of God? Do you

* S. Matt. ix. 26.

deplore the fall of your brother, for whom Jesus Christ died? Would to God that you were as jealous of the salvation of souls, as you are of your own interest!

3rd POINT. Consider—amongst all the sins of the world, he is sensible to yours in particular: he sees all the tepidity, weakness, and misery of your soul; he knows your ingratitude and infidelity to grace; he beholds the anger of God ready to burst forth and chastise you with rigour; his bowels of mercy yearn; he ardently desires your conversion: should not your heart respond to his love? Should you not think seriously on your salvation, for which he is consumed with zeal? Yet you defer your amendment from day to day; you love your danger. Admonition offends, and you cannot endure reprehension. Do you not fear lest the justice of God should avenge your contempt of his goodness?

“O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger, nor chastise me in thy wrath. Have pity on me, O Lord, for I am weak; heal me, for my bones are shaken, and my strength is withered. My soul is troubled; but thou, O Lord, how long wilt thou delay to succour me? Turn, O Lord, and deliver my soul; save me for thy mercy sake.”*



SATURDAY.

On Jesus offering himself as a Victim of Divine Justice for our sins.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus knowing it to be the will of his Father that he should become the Redeemer

* Psalm vi.

of the world, repair the glory, and satisfy the justice of the God-head, willingly accepts the charge; taking upon him from that moment the heavy burden of our sins. He might have chosen a life of glory and happiness, suitable to his majesty, whereas one single sigh of his heart would suffice to atone for the crimes of the whole world; but he voluntarily renounces this: and in order to satisfy the divine justice, deprives himself of all the pleasures, honors, and riches of life. O generous sacrifice! O immense obligation! What return have you made? What have you relinquished, from a desire of pleasing him? Will you not henceforth more gratefully correspond to that mercy which embraced all these privations for your sake? Remember the most agreeable service you can render him, and that which will most promote your own perfection, is to renounce your judgment, will, and desires, with all your sensual inclinations, to follow the inspirations of his spirit, and even every day retrench some innocent gratification, purely to testify your ardent desire of doing something to please him. Jesus deprives himself of all things to atone for your sins. Will you make a difficulty of denying yourself some trifling satisfaction, for his sake? Your sins deserve that you should be deprived of every consolation and every good; why then will you not renounce at least a vain joy, or a vanity that solicits you to evil and withdraws you from your duty?

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus is not satisfied with renouncing all things for the love of you, he also willingly embraces labour, suffering, confusion, and even a most cruel and ignominious death. His whole life is a perpetual cross, of which all the moments are as so

many sacrifices in which he immolates himself, consumed with pain and sorrow for you. Although the lives of all men and angels were yours, and that you devoted all to your Redeemer, you could never discharge the debt you owe him. Can you then refuse him a life so short and worthless as yours? O if you could enter into the abyss of your ingratitude! there is not a moment of your life, that would not be consecrated to penitence, employed in labour, or destined to mortification and the cross; yet shew me one in which you suffered any thing for God. O days ill employed! O years lost for eternity! When will you begin to do penance, and to bear the cross with Jesus?

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus embraces the cross, but he does not choose it; he receives it from the hand of his Father, and accepts it with submission, that he may live and die by obedience. He submits to all his orders, adores his decrees, and, as if he had no will, he allows himself to be conducted by that of his Father, renewing each moment of his life the desire of pleasing him. O with what advantage you would bear your cross, did you know how to take it from the hand of Jesus Christ, and conform yourself in all things to his sacred will! Your misfortune is, that you will neither do nor suffer but according to your own inclination, and thus you suffer and labour much with little consolation or profit.

O Saviour of my soul, teach me to renounce myself, and to regard only thy good pleasure in all the events of life. Evil is no longer evil, when it comes from thy hand: and even good ceases to be so, if dispensed by any other hand than thine.

THIRD SUNDAY.

Jesus exerts himself for the glory of his Father and our salvation, from the first moment of his life.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus the man-God commences his operations, for our salvation and the glory of his Father, from the first moment of his incarnation. Can you say the same of your life? Alas! hitherto you have been idle, you have done nothing for God or for your salvation. Ah! say at least this day, I shall now begin. But say it efficaciously; and if you desire Jesus to dwell in your heart, remember He cannot remain inactive, He must be living therein; and to live He must operate. An idle life is death; and charity that worketh not, is nearly extinct.

O Jesus, thou art the arm of God, that madest all things, and without which nothing has been made. Enter into and animate my heart; be thou my strength, my life, and the principle of all my actions: may my soul live only by thy spirit, my understanding form no thought but what proceeds from thee, and my will receive no affection but that which thou inspirest. Govern it as absolutely as thou dost thy sacred humanity, to the end it may not be one single moment without serving and loving thee.

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus begins to exert his faculties, not only with promptitude, but also with fervour, continually employing all his power to give each action its utmost perfection. But you, on the contrary, add supineness to delay. Your actions are full of imper-

fection, because performed with tardiness and indifference. Have you ever performed one worthy of the master whom you serve? O how tepid you are! how weak the efforts you make to follow Jesus, how ill you correspond with his graces! Do you not fear that he will reject you with disdain, and that he will say to you in his wrath: I would thou wert cold or hot; but thy lukewarmness makes me cast thee out of my mouth; I can no longer endure it?

3rd POINT. Consider—such as is the commencement of the life of Jesus, such shall be its progress and its end. Time shall not change his devotedness: and all the waters of the sea, that is to say, all the persecutions, ingratitude, and contradictions of sinners, shall never be able to extinguish the fire of his love. Admire the constancy with which Jesus Christ labours for your salvation, compare it with your fickleness and tepidity in his service. Your disposition changes almost every moment. You give yourself to devotion when you feel in it a sensible relish: you quit it when that fails. The least difficulty dejects, and you are only reanimated by heavenly consolations. These frequent changes destroy your perfection, and cause Jesus Christ to suffer in your soul an extreme violence.

O Sun of Justice, that dissipatest the darkness of the world, and rekindlest the fire of charity, by renewing the love of all the virtues, hide not from me the rays of thy grace, and thy divine inspirations; be not wearied with soliciting me to virtue and withdrawing me from sin; operate continually on my heart, and excite it to correspond with, and follow thy divine

light, that it may labour for thee, as thou hast incessantly laboured for my salvation.

MONDAY.

The merits of Jesus commence with his life.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus being in a state to merit, from the commencement of his life, he at the same moment begins to acquire for us, an inexhaustible treasure of grace and spiritual riches. His understanding is enlightened by the eternal wisdom: his will, though impeccable, is perfectly free for effecting all good. He is holy in his human nature, not only by sanctifying grace, which is the principle of merit, but also in a manner infinitely more noble, by increased sanctity, which is the source of all grace, and his glorious soul, being capable of suffering in a mortal body, is consequently capable of meriting. In fine, he has the promise of his Father, who from that instant manifests to him his will, saying—“Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee; ask of me and I will give unto thee all the nations for thy inheritance.”* And Jesus entering into the world, reciprocally replied—“Sacrifice and oblation, thou wouldst not, but thou hast formed for me a body: holocausts for sin were not pleasing to thee. Then said I, behold I come, according as is written of me, to do thy will, my God.”† And it is by this will, in virtue of this mutual compact, that “we have been sanctified by the oblation of the body of

* Psalm ii. 7, 8.

† Psalm xxxix. 7, 8.

Jesus Christ which was offered once.”* Admire this child, who, as Isaiah says, overthrows the power of Damascus, and carries away the spoils of Samaria, even before he can name his Father and Mother,” that is to say, who already triumphs over the powers of darkness, closes the gates of hell, and opens for us those of heaven. Be sorry for the treasures you lose by your tepidity, and which you could so easily amass by the good employment of time. You have not the happiness of angels, who have merited heaven from the first moment of their being, or that of saints, who began to merit it from the first use of reason. Have at least the contrition of penitents, who, by their tears and holy fervour, have repaid the loss sustained by the disorder of their life and the forgetfulness of their salvation.

2nd POINT. Consider—the merits of Jesus Christ are infinite ; first, on account of the infinite dignity of his person ; secondly on account of the infinite sanctity with which his soul is invested. O what joy replenished the heart of Jesus, in beholding the extent of these merits, sufficient to redeem all sinners, and acquire as much grace and glory, as God himself can bestow ! What consolation and happiness to possess in him such a treasure ! What confidence and courage should you have, remembering that the merits of Jesus Christ are your inheritance, and that the immensity of his treasures,—the value of all his actions, constitute your patrimony.

O Lord, how happy it is to be attached to thy service, and to be inseparably united to thee ! What

* Heb. x. 10.

may I not hope from thy mercy, if I know how to avail myself of it, blessed are they who participate in thy graces! Grant that I may never be deprived of them; I ask, O Lord, but one drop of thy blood, one tear from thine eyes, one sigh of thy heart: I shall be but too rich, if thou deignest to apply to me their merit.

3rd POINT. Consider—every action of the life of Jesus was infinitely meritorious, as all were infinitely holy. He merited in repose, he merited in all his exterior and interior acts, and even by his beatific love, because although in the latter he was not free with regard to God, who is its principal object, he was perfectly so with regard to the means which he chose for honouring him, and for doing good to man: but above all he consummated his merits in dying by obedience on the wood of the cross. His death was the completion of his merits, and the seal of the promise of his Father, who had attached to this august sacrifice the entire recompense of his labours, according to Isaiah—"If he shall give his life for sin, he shall see a long generation; and the will of the Lord shall be prosperous in his hand."* Learn hence that all your actions should be full, so that not one should be devoid of merit; but all the recompense you can hope for, depends upon suffering and death. Fly not then the cross, or death; but live so as to be found at that moment exempt from sin and rich in merit.

O my Saviour, I am resolved henceforth to labour with more ardour to amass treasures in heaven, never-

* Isaiah, liii. 10.

theless it is not in my own merits but in thine I place my confidence. Have mercy on me.

TUESDAY.

Jesus a Prisoner in his Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—there are three sorts of prisoners : the first for crime, the second for debt, the third for war. Divine love has reduced the Incarnate Word to be a three-fold prisoner in the womb of the Virgin Mother. He is a prisoner for crime, although innocence itself, because he is become the victim of sinners, that he may satisfy the justice of his Father, and restore them to grace. He is prisoner for debt, having taken upon him our sins, he is obliged to discharge their penalty. He is a prisoner of war : love has vanquished and reduced him to this state. Love triumphs over the force of his anger and the attributes of his majesty. Love encloses his immensity in a point, his eternity in a moment, his immortality in a mortal body, his wisdom and omnipotence in the simplicity and weakness of infancy. Admire his bounty, and place all your confidence in his mercy. Acknowledge that you are a criminal, and were justice rendered to you, you could expect nothing, but a prison of flames and an eternity of darkness. Confess that you are an insolvent debtor. Beseech the eternal Father, in the name of his divine Son, to remit the punishment due to your offences, as you forgive those who have offended you. Imitate the charity of your Saviour, in freeing souls from purgatory, unbinding the chains of sinners, and imparting consolation to the prisoner.

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus shall only issue from his prison to embrace the cross and death. On this he had resolved before entering therein; and if his ardent charity had not been governed by an infinite wisdom, he would have anticipated the term of his coming forth, to satisfy his burning zeal for our salvation and the glory of his Father. Thus the Royal Prophet considers him, though yet an infant, as a giant commencing his career with an inconceivable alacrity. Learn from hence, first that your life should be a perpetual captivity of love, and that religion to which God has called you, is a prison whence you should never come forth, in thought or effect, but to enter into heaven. Learn secondly, that you only live in order to die, that every moment of life approximates to death; but that the last is unknown to you. Be then always ready, and only consider time precious when it is employed in disposing you for that last moment which is to bear away the crown.

3rd. POINT. Consider—Jesus being on the point of ascending into heaven, is once more bound by his charity, and made prisoner in the holy sacrament even to the end of ages. O wonderful prison! O devoted captive, who, to satisfy his beneficence, by a miracle of power and love, whilst ascending into heaven there to manifest his glory, remaineth at the same time on earth to dwell with and in us, by a presence as real and true as it is secret and invisible. O my soul, behold thy Saviour twice the victim of charity, twice within a narrow captivity, twice bound with the chains of love to deliver himself to thee without reserve. Shall not this victorious love have power to make thee once his prisoner, and render him master of thy heart?

O Increased Wisdom that couldst bind a God, canst thou not, if thou wilt, arrest a sinner? Do so then, I conjure thee, and render me for ever the captive of Jesus and Mary; I desire it with my whole heart, for the chains that attach us to their service, are the pledges of our salvation and felicity.

WEDNESDAY.

The Solitude of Jesus in his Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus enters into solitude the first moment of his incarnation. The Blessed Virgin may be figuratively compared to the desert, where this Divine Infant hides himself; and it should be recollected, that she herself was in a profound retreat, when the angel announced to her her divine maternity. Do you desire that the Son of God should be born in your soul? Love recollection, and withdraw from useless conversation. Jesus Christ is born in the solitude of the heart, he is not found with the dissipated; because it is in retreat are to be found that peace, innocence, and purity of heart, which constitute his delight. O did we preserve our minds free from all vain occupations, how might we enjoy the presence of Jesus, and the sweetness of his divine consolations!

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus does not anticipate the moment for manifesting to man the glory of God, and his own divine power, by the operation of miracles, and the charms of his discourse. He remains in his solitude with perfect submission to the will of his Father, in obscurity, unknown to the world, “which

knew him not." Learn that it is better to remain hidden, attending to your own soul, than to perform miracles, neglecting yourself. The glory of a religious is to appear seldom, and neither to see nor be seen by men. Although you should behold the entire world, what is it but vanity? Raise up your eyes to heaven, there to contemplate God, and beseech him to pardon your sins and negligences. Leave vain things to vain men, and for your part, meditate only on the commandments of your God. Remain as contented in solitude, when obedience does not otherwise employ you, as if you were converting the entire world. Close the door of your heart, and invite Jesus, your beloved, into it; entertain yourself with him in your little retreat; you shall nowhere find so much peace.

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus remains not inactive in his solitude. He there treats with his Father of our salvation. Adore the care he takes of your sanctification; correspond with the designs of his providence over you. Endeavour, after his example, to render your solitude agreeable and useful. It will be agreeable, if you consider you are never more with God and with yourself than when alone in the time you give to prayer and self-consideration. It will be not only agreeable, but useful, if you know how to entertain yourself with God, and treat with him of the conversion of sinners, the salvation of souls, and your own perfection. This repose will be more active than action itself, and this leisure more useful than the most important occupations.

Teach me, my Saviour, ever to find employment in my solitude, and solitude in the midst of employments.

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May each be indifferent to me, provided I accomplish thy holy will. O that I could hold my mind elevated to God! Grant, my Saviour, that I may live in the world as one not of it; let the earth be to me a desert, where I shall neither see nor meet but with thee.

THURSDAY.

The silence of Jesus in his Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus chooses the time of night for his incarnation; because it is a time when all creatures are silent. “When all things were in peaceful silence, and the night in the midst of its course, thy omnipotent word came down from his royal throne.”* This demonstrates that the time of silence is the most proper for attracting God, and giving him an entrance into our heart. It is easy to lose God by immortification of the tongue; for the scripture says, “In the multitude of words there shall not want sin.”† On the contrary silence elevates the soul to God, and invites him into it. All superfluous discourses that violate the rule of silence, are so many streams that divide the heart, and dissipate the thoughts and affections.

My Saviour, it is the property of wisdom to moderate the tongue, and regulate discourse; since thou art the increated wisdom, be equally the master of my tongue and heart. Direct all my words, and retrench not only what is evil, but also what is useless and superfluous.

* Wisd. xviii. 14.

† Prov. x. 19.

2nd POINT. Consider—the Son of God is the substantial Word of the eternal Father, and the perfect expression of his divine attributes: nevertheless, although he entered into the world to make him known to men, he employs only the three last years of his life in preaching and instructing, preserving an admirable silence during the space of thirty years. Why has he done so? First, to cure the wound which the tongue of the serpent had inflicted on our first parents. Secondly, to expiate the sins of the tongue, which are innumerable. Thirdly, to glorify his Father by silence, as he had glorified him from eternity by the expression of his greatness. In fine, to teach us that silence is the school of wisdom; and that a man that has not learned to hold his peace, shall never speak to the purpose. Follow then the example of the incarnate Word; be a religious observer of silence from these same motives, that is to say, in order to heal the evil inclination of corrupt nature that causes faults of the tongue; to atone for sins committed by it, to pay homage to the infinite greatness of God, who surpasses all our praise; and to obtain from the holy spirit the lights necessary when you ought to speak, so that it may be said: It is not you who speak, it is the spirit of your heavenly Father that speaks in you.

3rd POINT. Consider—the silence observed by religious, originates in that of the incarnate Word. Therefore you should account it as sacred; and as you respect the image that represents this divine Infant, you should also revere this holy practice, which is an image of his silence, and an excellent disposition for prayer, communion, and the presence of God.

Eternal Word, whom love has rendered mute as an infant, without prejudice to thy wisdom, place the seal of thy silence on my lips ; that my tongue, on which thou art laid in the adorable sacrament, may never sully its purity, or be rendered unworthy of receiving thee. Arrest its sallies by thy presence, and grant that I may forget the language of the world, to learn that of thy heart.

FRIDAY.

The Prayer of Jesus in his Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—prayer was the chief occupation of Jesus from the moment of his incarnation until that of his death. We may say that prayer was his life, and his life a continual prayer ; He perfectly accomplished that which he inculcated to his disciples, that we must always pray. The saints have followed his example, and have always endeavoured to keep their hearts united with God, in as much as human weakness would permit. If you cannot continue this exercise as uninterruptedly, at least endeavour to begin and end each action by prayer. Never undertake any thing until you have called God to your aid, that you may do nothing but in union with him, since without his assistance you can do nothing but evil. Moreover, in concluding each act, omit not to give the glory to God, if it has succeeded, and to ask pardon if you have committed any fault. If you observe this practice with exactitude, you will soon arrive at perfection.

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus being the Saviour and Mediator of men, prays generally for all, and obtains by his prayers the graces necessary for their salvation. Relying on this truth, place all your confidence in Jesus Christ, and be assured he has obtained for you the graces you require for arriving at sanctity here, and eternal felicity hereafter. But in praying for you he has not dispensed with your praying for yourself and your own perfection. One of the greatest graces he has obtained for you is the grace of prayer. Be then a lover of prayer; and that you may profit the more by it, unite your will to that of your divine Master, neither ask nor desire any thing but that which he himself has demanded for you. Say with St. Teresa: O my amiable Saviour, why should I ask any thing, but what thou art pleased to give me? Accomplish in me, Lord, all the designs which it has pleased thee to form for me. All my happiness consists in willing only what thou willest, and abandoning myself entirely to thy good pleasure. Chastise me not in thy anger, O Lord, by granting my desires; but rather destroy in me the desires of self-love, that I may find my life in thy love, and in the accomplishment of thy holy will.

3rd POINT. Consider—although Jesus prays for and extends to all the effects of his charity, nevertheless he prays especially for some, principally for his elect, and above all, for his blessed Mother. Look upon her as the sanctuary where he offers his prayer, as the temple where this sovereign Pontiff commences his sacrifice. Is it not just that she should have the largest share in his prayers as well as in his merits? St. John Damascene calls her the fruit of prayer. If prayer has

produced a fruit so blessed, and operated so great a miracle of grace, it was not so much the prayer of her parents, as that of her well beloved Son.

O Blessed Virgin, temple of the Divinity, throne of the Father, sanctuary of the Son, dwelling of the Holy Ghost, present our vows to our high Priest, that he may rectify them if they are not according to his heart, and grant them if conformable to his designs.

SATURDAY.

Sufferings of Jesus in his Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus begins to suffer from the first moment of his incarnation. He suffers with an entire knowledge, which considerably augments his pain. He suffers with an entire resignation, humbly accepting the chalice presented by his Father. He suffers without delay or reserve. He does not defer a moment to assume the penalty due to our sins. O what excess of charity towards you! Jesus will not be a moment without suffering for your sake; and you cannot suffer a moment in his service. Are you not amazed at his bounty, and confounded at your own coldness and ingratitude? Why do you delay to rank yourself under the banner of the cross? Hasten to do penance: begin from this moment to mortify yourself, and bear the yoke of your master. But little time remains for you.

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus not content with enduring his present sufferings, anticipates the future ; and as he cannot yet place his sacred body on the cross, he nails his heart thereon. Instead of a crown of immortal delights, his Father presents chains to bind, thorns to crown, and scourges to tear him. O what a reception on his entering the world ! But does he refuse these torments ? Does he demand delay ? Does he recoil ? Does he allege excuses ? Does he represent the dignity of his person, his innocence, and his merit ? Does he transfer them to another ? Does he only accept them in part ? Ah ! no ; He accepts all. He offers his head to thorns, his hands to bonds, his face to be spit upon, his body to the cross and death. Yes, my Father, I willingly accept all the dispositions of thy sweet providence, however severe they seem to my senses : thy good pleasure is sufficient to make me love them. Such is the heart of Jesus : in what does yours resemble him ? He goes to meet the cross ; and you cowardly fly from it. He calls for suffering ; and you repel it with horror. Crush this delicacy ; encourage yourself to suffer something for him who has suffered all things for you.

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus not only feels his own pains ; his love makes him sensible of the sufferings of his blessed Mother, the torments of the martyrs, the tears of penitents, the labours and persecutions of all the saints. His heart tastes of their bitterness, and by compassion he suffers with all, and more than all. There have been saints who, in the fervour of love, desired to prolong their life even to the end of the world, that they might suffer a new martyrdom at each

instant ; but they have not obtained the effect of their desires, although they had the merit. The Son of God alone has borne in his heart, the feeling of all the miseries that man ever had or ever shall have even to the consummation of ages.

O my Saviour, what a generous heart hast thou imprisoned in this little body, if I may so speak. Ah ! how narrow is my heart when compared with thine ! How little am I touched by the sufferings of my neighbour, and how sensible to my own ! What obduracy and what tenderness at the same time : what tenderness for myself, what hardness in believing and feeling the afflictions of others.

FOURTH SUNDAY,

OR THE FEAST OF THE EXPECTATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

The holy Desires with which Jesus inspires his Blessed Mother.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus is united with his Blessed Mother, as the fruit with the tree that produces it, with this difference, that the fruit draws its nourishment from the tree that bears it, whilst Jesus communicates his perfections, inclinations, and desires, to the Blessed Virgin. The first desire she forms by the inspiration of her divine Son, is to give him to men as their Saviour and Redeemer. Of what use is a treasure hidden ? and what avails wisdom, if it remains unknown ? Jesus is a treasure the Eternal Father has confided to Mary, that he may become the

ransom of sinners. She bears within her breast the Eternal Wisdom, not for herself alone, but to communicate to us her riches, without fearing to exhaust them, because they are infinite. O Blessed Virgin, how great is thy charity! Knowest thou that in giving us this dear Son, thou abandonest him to the cross and death? If he charges himself with our crimes, he must endure the penalty, and efface their ignominy with his blood and life. Alas! thou knowest that this will be the consequence; and nevertheless, whatever horror thou feelest at the thought, thy zeal to succour us miserable creatures prevails above every other consideration. Ah! may heaven and earth eternally praise this excessive bounty!

O my sovereign Advocate, I beseech you to obtain for me two things equally necessary. Give unto me your divine Son, without whom I should be for ever poor: and give me to your Son, who is my wisdom and light, and without whom I should be for ever in darkness.

2nd POINT. Consider—the second desire of the Blessed Virgin is to see Jesus. Her eyes would behold the object her heart so tenderly loves. The desires of the patriarchs and prophets, who so ardently sighed for the Messiah, are coldness when compared with those of Mary. The intensity of her desires surpasses the united ardor of all the seraphim. Compare your coldness with the fervor of her devotion, and accuse yourself of having so little love of Jesus Christ. Why do so many useless desires disturb your heart? You should only desire two things in this world: one is, to

possess Jesus Christ in the blessed sacrament, as the Blessed Virgin possessed him in the incarnation; the other, to behold him glorious in heaven, as the Blessed Virgin beheld him passable in the manger. The former is the consolation and happiness of earth; the latter, the joy and felicity of paradise.

3rd POINT. Consider—the third desire of the Blessed Virgin is, to serve Jesus Christ as her Son and her God. As her Son, she desires to render him the most devoted cares of maternal love. As her God, she desires to adore him with the most profound submission of the humblest servant. As her Son and her God, she desires to consecrate to him every instant of her life, every movement of her heart, without division or reserve. Renew this day, after her example, the resolution you have formed to serve God more faithfully, and propose seriously to employ this day therein. It is but a short time, yet it may perhaps be longer than that of your life. Consider the day well employed, if you can, by frequent acts, enkindle in your heart the desire of serving God, of seeing God, and of communicating to the whole world the knowledge and love of God and of Jesus Christ his only Son.

O Virgin Mother of God! that I could place in thy hands the hearts of all men, to be consecrated as an offering of gratitude for the favors conferred on us through thy mediation! Accept at least the only one over which I have power, my own—faithless and guilty though it may be, that presented by thy pure hands, it may become an oblation worthy of thy divine Son.

MONDAY.

The Poverty of Jesus in his Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—all things were made by the Word, and consequently all things belonged to him. Nevertheless he despoils himself of all in his incarnation, and makes himself poor for love of us. “You know,” says St. Paul, “what has been the goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ, who being rich became poor for love of you, that you might become rich by his poverty.”* Compare this mercy of the Son of God with your ingratitude, and his total privation with your inordinate attachment to your own conveniencies. Jesus loves poverty; and not finding it in the bosom of his heavenly Father, he comes to seek it in that of his blessed Mother. You, far from seeking, fly from it; when it presents itself, you endeavour as far as possible to avoid it. Jesus experiences the effects of extreme poverty, and you are contented with the honorable title and vow of poverty, without being willing to suffer any of its privations. Jesus proposes to be born, to live, and to die in poverty. You cannot bear to want any thing; you are solicitous in providing, and disquieted under privations. You are not content with necessities, you seek superfluities. Compare your life with your state, yourself with Jesus Christ, and consider how you imitate this admirable model.

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus not only despoils himself of all things; he renounces himself to become ours.

* S. Paul, Cor. viii. 9.

He had given us an entire world by the act of creation ; but *himself* he had reserved. In the incarnation he reserves nothing, he gives himself to us, not for time, but eternity. He begins to be ours for ever ; if we lose him not through our own fault. All true religious are then rich ; though poor in their cell, they are rich in their conscience, and their repose is more tranquil on their hard bed, than that of the rich man in purple and silk.

O Saviour of the world, how rich is the man who possesses thee ! All little and poor as thou art, thy value is above all earthly riches. O did the world know thee ! O did it know the price of this evangelical pearl that Mary has conceived ! Happy would I be could I enclose it within my heart ! What should I not give to purchase it ? Should I not leave all things ? Should I not renounce myself ? What can be wanting to him who possesses Jesus ? If the poverty of Jesus makes us rich, what may we not hope from his treasures ?

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus having reserved nothing, is reduced to have need of us. David, heretofore, said to God, “ Lord, thou art my God ; because thou needest not my goods.”* Thou art wisdom, thou wantest not my counsels. Thou art the sovereign judge, thou needest not that I should usurp that function. But behold here a marvellous change. God has made himself so poor, that he cannot live, or be clothed, or nourished without the aid of his creature. Let us no longer fear our judge, says St. Maximus : he is poor, we can gain

* Psalm xv. 2.

him by our presents, he will not refuse them. If you say you have nothing to offer to the Son of God, I reply, you have only to give him your heart; He will be satisfied, for it is what he most desires; he seeks every where hearts that love him, but he finds none. He complains not of hunger or thirst; but he complains of having so few friends, notwithstanding that he loves all men with such ardent tenderness.

My soul, how long wilt thou give him cause for this complaint? How long wilt thou continue to reject his friendship? O my Saviour, pardon the obdurate selfish and malignant traitor, who for the future devotes to thee and thee alone every thought and affection of his heart.

TUESDAY.

The Submission and Obedience of Jesus in his Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus draws his being from the obedience of the Blessed Virgin,—“Behold the hand-maid,” &c. O how efficacious is this fiat! It is not a word of command, like that which drew the world forth from nothing; it is a word of submission and obedience: but this obedience gives a being to the Creator, destroys the tyranny of the devil, and re-establishes peace between God and man. The apostle says, “As all die in Adam, all revive in Jesus Christ;”* and Jesus Christ, who is “the resurrection and the

* 1 Cor. xv. 22.

life,"* is the fruit of the obedience that Mary renders to the Eternal Father. O Blessed Virgin, who can sufficiently admire the power of thy obedience? How powerful is the will of man, when submissive to that of God! If you would subject yourself to the divine pleasure, Jesus would immediately be born in your heart. Why does God not bless your designs? and why does all you undertake succeed so ill, and produce so little spiritual profit? It is because you do your own will and not his; he has no part in your counsels, you only consult your own interest. You say to him every day, "Thy will be done;" but it proceeds not from your heart. You will what God wills, but you do not will it strongly; you do not will it entirely; it is in that you fail. Your weak and inconstant will continually wavers between heaven and earth.

2nd POINT. Consider—the obedience of the Blessed Virgin having raised her to the dignity of Mother of God, her divine Son would dwell in her during the time appointed by his Eternal Father: he does not prolong, neither does he shorten it. He measures not the time to his desires, but accommodates his desires to the time, without retarding or advancing it a single moment. Moreover, that which he does in the commencement of his life, he will continue until the end; and his death will be the completion of his obedience, which shall fulfil those words in their full extent: I do always that which he wills, and I will do it to the last sigh. Admire this punctual obedience, the want of

* Cor. xv. 21.

which has caused so much disorder in your life. You obey, but out of time ; you speak when you should be silent ; you employ the time appointed for one duty in a different one. You can never make any considerable progress in perfection, if your life is not according to your rule, if you are not exact in observing the orders of obedience, and doing each action in the time and manner prescribed.

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus not only submits to the will of his heavenly Father ; he would also obey his Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, the princes, judges, servants, in a word, all men. He would be ranked among the vassals of the Roman emperor, and assume the badge of circumcision, in order to be subject to the law. In fine, he beholds his Eternal Father in creatures, and renders him obedience in the persons of all those who represent his power on earth. He passes yet further ; for he would obey even the executioners who put him to death.

O prodigious annihilation ! What excuse, O Lord, can our pride find henceforth ? Thou renouncest thy will, though thou art God ; and I would do mine, who am but a worm of the earth. Thou art pleased to obey, and I would command. Ah ! Lord, am I not thy slave ? Crush my pride by thy submission, and grant I may serve and respect thee in the persons of my brethren. Enlighten my understanding to perceive and feel the important truth, that it is too great an honor to be the last in thy house.

WEDNESDAY.

The Humiliations of Jesus in his Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—the infinite humiliation of the Word Incarnate, descending from the throne of his glory to the lowly place of his conception. Although the Blessed Virgin exceeds in purity and sanctity the most elevated of the heavenly spirits, yet the church, admiring the infinite disproportion between the Creator and the creature, exclaims in astonishment: Thou hadst no horror of the Virgin's womb. Ponder the humiliation of the Son of God, who, through an inconceivable condescension, disdains not to enter our breasts, and become the food of our souls. O incomprehensible wonder! Daily does the Lord Jesus humble himself, as he did in descending from his royal throne to become incarnate for us. Daily does he come to us with sensible marks of humility. Daily does he descend at the voice of his minister from the bosom of his eternal Father, to dwell on our altars. O how pure should be the heart which is to lodge the Holy of Holies! "If thou hadst the purity of an angel, and the sanctity of St. John Baptist, thou wouldst not be worthy to receive this sacrament. Purify therefore the dwelling of thy heart: banish thence the world and the tumult of the passions. Know, nevertheless, thou canst not sufficiently prepare thyself by the merit of any action of thine, although thou shouldst prepare thyself a whole year together, and think of nothing else."*

* Imitat. Christ. b. 4.

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus humbles himself infinitely beneath the majesty of his Father, by the submission of his soul, although it is united with the Divinity. The more the Father glorifies the Son, the more profoundly the Son abases himself before his Father. It would seem he only ascends the throne of the Divinity in order to descend the lower, and render his annihilation more profound. How opposed is the spirit of Jesus to that of the world, and to the vanity which makes you so often forget your own baseness! The least breath of praise inflates you with pride; a word suffices to raise you to the clouds. A passing feeling of sensible devotion fills you with secret self-complaisance, and you think yourself something. Distrust this self-love, and guard lest it be nourished by the consolations of heaven. The gifts of God humble great souls, and render them more fearful; because they know they must render an account thereof, and that it is dangerous not only to abuse, but also not to profit by them.

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus not content with humbling himself before his Father, proposes, for his sake, to abase himself beneath all men, to fly honor, to converse with the poor, to wash the feet of his disciples, to accept the contempt and opprobrium which the pride and envy of the Pharisees shall cause him to suffer. Already he renounces every mark of greatness which could attract respect and esteem; and although he is King of kings, he prefers the quality of servant to the title of monarch, as more appropriate to his design of becoming the least of all. Even now he invites you to follow him, and by his eloquent example says: “Learn

of me, because I am meek and humble of heart.”* Remember this lesson. Hear with what respect he speaks interiorly to his heavenly Father: “O Lord, I am thy servant, and the Son of thy hand-maid.”†

O Jesus, who in thy incarnation didst embrace humiliation, as thy inseparable companion until death, destroy in my heart every sentiment of vanity; that my life may be conformable to thine, and that I may place all my glory and ambition in participating in thy humiliations and contempts.

THURSDAY.

The Weakness of Jesus in his Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus could have entered the world with the marks of his royal power, and in the vigour of manhood, yet he prefers assuming the weakness of infancy, and suffers by election what other infants suffer from necessity. First, he is so weak as not to be able to pronounce a word, either to complain or declare his wants. He could, as Theodoret says, make his voice resound from the heavens, but he chooses rather to weep in the manger, and remain mute in the Virgin’s womb, to teach you to suffer in silence, and hide your little inconveniencies as a treasure, lest they be taken from you—not to dispute in words, to yield modestly, as if you were without reply; to bear injuries, as if you felt them not; in fine, to restrain your tongue when impelled by passion, “as a man not having reproof in his mouth.”

* St. Matt. xi. 29.

† Ps. cxv. 16.

Incarnate Word, grant me thy grace to practise the admirable lessons thou teachest: and let my tongue cleave to my palate, when I am tempted to manifest the trouble and disorder of my irregular affections. May I say with Moses: "I cannot speak." I must, by silence, imitate the infant Jesus. His weakness is my strength, his simplicity my defence.

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus is so weak as to be incapable of all motion, except that which is natural to unborn infants, to teach you to repress the movements of corrupt nature, and only to act by those of obedience and grace. You must so bind and weaken self-love, that it can no longer oppose divine love in your heart. The more you captivate it, the more vigorous will your mind become for advancing towards perfection. Be not afflicted when corporal infirmity obliges you to remain inactive, but rather say with St. Paul: "I glory in my infirmity, I delight in being despised as a useless person; and far from being dejected in the condition to which I am reduced, for the love of Jesus Christ, it constitutes the subject of my glory; because when I am weak, then I am strong, I am nearer unto God, the virtue of Jesus Christ dwells in me, and manifests its power so much the more as I can attribute nothing to my own strength or industry.

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus is so weak he cannot use the exterior organs of his body. He can neither see nor hear; feeling is the only sense that is free, and it is so only to suffer. This should oblige you to mortify your senses, since it is to expiate their indulgence the Son of God is reduced to extreme weakness. Repress

the curiosity and wandering of your eyes, which often endangers the purity of the heart. Father Faber, of the Society of Jesus, often deprived his sight of the most innocent objects, that he might be farther removed from those that were dangerous.

Divine Infant, who wouldst bear my infirmities, in order to communicate to me thy strength, grant that I may be deaf, blind, dumb, and impotent for evil, that my virtue may be perfected in infirmity, and that being weak and innocent as a child with regard to evil, I may be gifted by thee with the strength and courage of the saints for effecting good.

FRIDAY.

The Dependence of Jesus in his Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus who is sovereignly independent in the bosom of his eternal Father, is reduced to the lowest dependence in his incarnation. Whereas he receives his divine being and life from his Father without any dependence, he may be said to be a dependant on his blessed Mother for his mortal life and being. What a glory for the Virgin! What a humiliation for Jesus! What a prodigy, that a God should take his life from his creature! Learn to depend on the Mother and the Son: from Him you hold the life of nature and grace; through her you expect the preservation of both;—from Him you hope for glory; through her you expect the grace that will enable you to obtain it. Love your dependence, it is your happiness. Dispose not of a single moment

of your life but for the glory of him that has given it ; abandon yourself entirely to his conduct. Your repose and happiness depend on this abandonment. Should you withdraw from it your life would be miserable.

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus depends on his blessed Mother for his support ; the heart of an unborn infant is too weak to act of itself, it must be sustained by that of the mother. If your heart is too weak to practise mortification, and endure all that is painful to sense in the exercise of a spiritual life, make use of those of Jesus and Mary ; draw from them your support. Remember that in the Blessed Eucharist is communicated to you the same blood which he received from his blessed Mother ; that being fed with the same nourishment, your life may resemble his.

3rd Point. Consider—Jesus depends on his blessed Mother for his preservation. What condescension in the Son of God, thus to subject himself to human misery ! He is unable to defend himself, if we consider the natural strength of his tender and delicate body ; his preservation depends entirely on his blessed Mother. Learn to live under the protection of Mary, and know that nothing is more frail than the life of grace ; a word, a thought, a look may deprive you of it. Alone you are too weak to preserve so precious a treasure. Distrust yourself, be always fearful of losing it, and recur continually to your blessed Mother, whose aid will never fail, if you do not withdraw yourself from her protection.

O Blessed Virgin, my salvation depends on you ; if you abandon me, I must perish. Watch then for my

defence, take me under your protection: remember that your most dear Son lives in me by grace, but he is yet weak in my heart: obtain for me that he may not die therein, but rather that he may become daily more strong in all that regards his glory and my perfection.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

The holy Desires of Jesus in his Incarnation.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus is inflamed with an ardent desire to glorify his Father, and manifest Him to men. He proposes to himself the honor and service of God, as the centre of all his affections and the end of all his actions. His example has inspired the saints with an admirable zeal for the glory of God: all their fervour was but an emanation of that furnace of love in which his soul was consumed. “I seek not my own glory.” “My glory is nothing.”* I make no account of the applause of men. What ardour and purity of love! Approach this fire to enkindle your zeal, and purify your intentions from the self-love that sullies all your good works. Examine your desires and the secret movements of your heart. Can you say, with Jesus, that you seek not your own honor, that you despise reputation and the praise of men; that all your cares and desires tend only to the greater glory of God? Your profession obliges you hereto; and one day you will have to pass through the fire of divine justice, if you be not previously purified in that of love.

* St. John viii.

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus beholding the love his Father bears to men, for whose salvation he sent him into the world, burns with an ardent desire to trace for them a perfect model of all virtues, to employ his power in relieving their miseries, and his wisdom in teaching them the way to heaven. To this object he dedicates all the labours and sufferings of his life ; referring the glory to his eternal Father, and transferring to man all the merit. O liberality of Jesus, what a treasure art thou to us ! What use do you make of this treasure ? Whence comes it that you remain so poor amidst such riches ? Faithless soul ! you have before your eyes the humility, patience, charity, meekness, fortitude, and all the other virtues that Jesus Christ has exercised from the purest motives, and in a manner all divine. How have you hitherto profited by his example ? Whence comes it that you have not yet acquired any solid virtue ? Your obedience is only the shell ; the soul that should animate it is wanting. Your devotion is only exterior ; the respectful remembrance and sentiment of the presence of God do not enliven it. You offer an imperfect victim, without heart or spirit.

Spirit of Jesus, animate my heart, and elevate my intentions, that I may become a perfect imitator of thy heroic virtues.

3rd POINT. Consider—these two desires of Jesus produce a third, which is, to enter into the world, to be born in a manger, as a preparation for the cross ; to confer on the Blessed Virgin the glorious title of Mother of God ; in fine, to gain our hearts, and bring peace to the world by his birth. O that you loved Jesus Christ

as he has loved you! O that you would prepare a place for this divine Infant in the midst of your heart! Though that heart may be now but a vile stable from the impurity of its affections, and a rock by its obduracy, Jesus Christ would soon change it into a paradise by his presence.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

The Blessed Virgin brings forth the Saviour of the world in the Stable of Bethlehem.

1st PRELUDE. Enter in spirit into the stable of Bethlehem, where with the Blessed Virgin you will find Saint Joseph, and many blessed spirits, amongst whom is your Angel Guardian.

2nd PRELUDE. Beg grace to honor this mystery, to taste of its sweetness, and to draw profit from it.

1st POINT. Consider—the *patience* with which the Blessed Virgin suffers the ungrateful reception her divine Son meets in Bethlehem. She seeks every where for a lodging, and every one rejects her, because she is poor. She is constrained to retire into a stable with the infant that she is soon to give to the world. She enters it with an admirable meekness, without complaining of the inconvenience of this comfortless abode. She respects in this conjuncture the order of God, and the sweet dispositions of his providence. O my soul, where is thy patience? Thou canst not suffer the least contempt without indignation. Art thou greater than the

Mother of God? Where is the respect thou owest to Jesus Christ? How often hast thou refused him an entrance into thy heart? He knocks at the door by his inspirations; he awaits patiently, and thou attendest not to him: dost thou not fear that he will reject thee in his turn, and that when thou knockest at the door of heaven, he will answer, "The door is shut?"

O my Saviour, I am resolved to dispose my heart for thy reception, by banishing thence, all that can displease thee. Enter it as my God, to be adored; as author of grace, to destroy sin; as protector, to repel my enemies; as master, to teach the practice of all virtues; and as a treasure, to enrich me with all good.

2nd POINT. Consider—that the Blessed Virgin, being retired in prayer, rapt in heavenly contemplation, and glowing with intense love, brings forth her Divine Son with inconceivable joy and miraculous purity. With what humility and devotion does this blessed Mother behold her Son, the fruit of benediction, "the desire of the eternal hills." She adores him as her God, embraces him as her Son; she clothes him, and lays him in the manger, whilst her eyes and heart are immoveably fixed on him.

O Blessed Virgin, how great is my joy to behold thee Mother of such a Son! Immortal thanks to the eternal Father, who hath given him to us; to the Son, who hath united himself to our nature; to the Holy Ghost, who hath formed this sacred humanity in thy virginal womb: thanks to thee, O Blessed Virgin, who hadst borne him nine months; to St. Joseph, who hath

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so carefully guarded his tender infancy, and ministered to his wants.

3rd POINT. Consider—the holy occupation of the Blessed Virgin attending her new born infant; her joy in being mother of such a Son; the delight with which she beholds the “most beautiful amongst the children of men;” the respect with which she adores him—the holy fervor with which she offers herself to fulfil the duties of Mother and servant—the homage and obedience she tenders to him as her Sovereign, and the ardor with which she desires the execution of his designs for the salvation of man.

Most holy and happy Mother of God, allow me to participate in thy joy, since thou art my sovereign mistress, and I am thy devoted servant. Teach me thyself to adore thy divine Son, to render him my homage, and consecrate myself to the accomplishment of his most holy will. Offer him my vows, offer him my whole being; beseech him to be a Saviour to me, that I may find access to him, and draw fruit from his nativity; that his weakness may be my strength, his pains my consolation, his poverty my riches, and his tears my happiness.



SECOND DAY OF THE OCTAVE.

On the Birth of Jesus in the Stable of Bethlehem.

1st POINT. Consider—who is this new born infant? He whom you behold laid in a manger, trembling with cold, and seemingly in all things like unto other infants,

is nevertheless the Son of the living God, the heir of all his eternal Father's possessions, the living image of his substance, the Wonderful, the Mighty One, the Omnipotent, the Saviour of mankind. What has wrought this stupendous prodigy, and reduced sovereign greatness to this abjection? It is his love for you. For you he is become man; for you he is born in a stable. What have you done for him? What have you done for yourself? What inconvenience, humiliation, or suffering have you endured for his glory and your own salvation? Can you expect to gain heaven by the indulgence of vanity, sloth, or self-will? Such is not the example given you by this little one.

2nd POINT. Consider—the circumstances of his birth. He enters the world poor, weak, and humble, a stranger, unknown, and unprotected by any. How opposed is the spirit of God to that of the world! The Son of God chooses poverty; the world values only riches and honors. Which will you follow, the one that leads to beatitude, or the other which leads to perdition? The Son of God takes his delight in the humble; he abases himself to a familiarity with little ones, he embraces their condition and makes himself little with them. Do you desire to enjoy a familiarity with God? Love abjection, prefer the conversation of the poor, to that of the rich of this world, who are often the most remote from heaven. The Son of God would be born in the lowliest and most inconvenient place. The world esteems only pomp and self-ease. Of which does your practice prove your esteem? You cannot be deceived in following the judgment of God; but in adhering to that

of men you will surely err. In fine, the Son of God at his birth exercises obedience, in submitting to the edict of Cæsar, and ranking himself among his vassals, that your name might be written in the book of life. How far removed is this spirit from that of the world, which would always command, and never obeys but with regret.

3rd POINT. Consider—in this new born babe the difference between heaven and earth—the stable, which is the place of his temporal birth, and the bosom of his Father, whence he draws his eternal being ; in a word, between what he is as God, and as an infant in the crib. As God he is begotten in the splendour of his Father's glory ; as man he is born amid the darkness of sinners. As God he is clothed with majesty and power ; as man he bears the garb of poverty. As God he sustains all things by his word ; as man he is not able to support himself, but is borne in the arms of his mother. Happy Mother, who bearest the treasure of the eternal Father to impart it to men ! Happy Infant, not less adorable in the crib and in the bosom of thy Mother, than in the splendour of thy Father's glory ! I envy not the pomp and riches of the world, but I beg of thee the spirit of humility, of which thou givest me so signal an example, the spirit of poverty, which thou voluntarily embracest to make me partaker of thy riches, the spirit of obedience, which causes thee to be born between two vile animals, and which will hereafter fasten thee to the gibbet between two thieves.

THIRD DAY OF THE OCTAVE.

Sentiments of a devout soul on the birth of Jesus Christ.

1st POINT. Consider—"This day is born to you a Saviour." Come, faithful soul, participate in the joy of his birth; ye just, rejoice in God your Saviour; for the holy of holies is born to restore innocence and virtue to the world! Be consoled, ye sinners, because a Saviour is born who will deliver his people from their sins! Let the afflicted cease to sigh, for a comforter is given to sweeten their pains, a physician to heal their wounds, a charitable friend to discharge their debts! "Come, let us praise the Lord with gladness; let us joyfully sing to God our Saviour."* Let us present ourselves before this divine Infant celebrating his praise, let our hymns and canticles resound at his crib, and let us not go forth from this stable which he has chosen for the place of his nativity. Rejoice, daughter of Sion; Jerusalem, exult with gladness, because this day peace has descended on the earth, the true light has illumined the darkness of the world, and Israel rejoiceth in the birth of her king! Glory and praise to the most Holy Trinity, which hath invented so admirable a means to save man, and confound the pride of the demon!

2nd POINT. Consider—"This day is born to you a Saviour." Approach with confidence to the throne of his mercy. My soul, what fearest thou? Enter this abode, which is the tabernacle of thy divine spouse;

* Ps. xciv.

enter the house of God, approach without fear, and unite your heart to that of this new-born babe. He will not reject or cast you from him; he will receive you meekly, without reproaching you with your infidelities, and make you feel the effects of his goodness. What canst thou fear from an infant weeping in a manger? He complains not of his sufferings, but he weeps for your sins. He is not come to destroy, but to seek you; not to judge, but to save; not to punish, but to bear himself the penalty of your offences, that you may be discharged therefrom. Be only contrite, and he will pardon you; weep for your sins, and he will efface them with his tears, and supply by the tenderness of his heart for the obduracy of yours.

3rd POINT. Consider,—“This day is born to you a Saviour.” Enter this poor stable which the King of Heaven has chosen for his dwelling place, that he may converse familiarly with you. Behold this humble crib, which contains the treasure of heaven, the ransom of the world, the joy of men and angels! Pray that you may be received into this cave, and pass these days there with Jesus and Mary. Behold a God made man, laid on straw, swathed in poor linen for your salvation! Prostrate yourself humbly at the feet of this divine Infant, make there an altar to adore him as your God, offering him the sacrifice of your heart. Give it to him without reserve, and beseech him to engrave thereon his most sweet and adorable name. Dedicate all the powers of your soul and body to his service; abandon yourself entirely to him, and let him act in you and by you according to his good pleasure, without resistance on your part. Tell him confidently all your pains and

difficulties, discover to him the movements of your heart, and he will accomplish all your desires. For he comes in the spirit of humility and meekness to listen to the prayer of the humble, to console the afflicted, strengthen the weak, and remedy all our infirmities. O my soul, what more can you desire? Your God is so nigh to you, that you can bear him in your arms and press him to your bosom; for "The Word was made flesh and dwelleth amongst us." Ah! that my heart could serve him for a cradle! Ah! that I could become humble at the sight of his abasement, poor at the sight of his desolate manger, patient at the contemplation of his sufferings, penitent at the spectacle of his tears!

O most sweet and humble Babe, thou who hast descended from the throne of thy glory unto the dust of the earth to unite thyself with me, draw me from the earth unto thy throne that I may be united to thee for ever.

FOURTH DAY OF THE OCTAVE.

The Angels render Homage to Jesus at his birth.

1st POINT. Consider—the joy and astonishment of the angelic host, in beholding the Son of God born in a stable. They are amazed to see a God thus humbled; they rejoice that the sun of justice has commenced to shed those beams which shall soon dissipate the darkness of the world, and restore to man the life of grace and glory. Admire the charity of the angels,

who rejoice as much for our happiness as for their own. Admire the humility and respect with which they behold the glory of the hypostatic union communicated to human nature, which is inferior to theirs. Learn to love virtue and the favors of God in your brethren, and without envy to see them exalted above you; participate in their happiness, saying with the Prophet: "I respect, my God, all the dispositions of thy providence over thy creatures. I am a partaker with all them that fear thee, and that keep thy commandments."*

I offer thee the talents thou hast given me, and all the graces I have received from thee. I consent to be despoiled of them if such is thy good pleasure, that they may be imparted to another who will make better use of them. If thou art pleased to preserve them to me, I conjure thee to impart still greater to my brethren, to the end thou mayest be more glorified, thy goodness better known, and that those whom thou honorest with thy favors, may supply for the little fruit yielded by those with which I have been favoured.

2nd POINT. Consider—with what ardour the blessed spirits descend from heaven to adore their newborn king. Admire the devoted submission with which they render him their homage, acknowledging his infinite greatness, power, and wisdom, concealed beneath this wonderful humiliation. Annihilating themselves before him, they acknowledge that, compared with his perfections and prerogatives, their charity is

* Ps. cxviii.

coldness, their light darkness, their strength weakness, their virtue imperfection; confessing that all they possess, whether by nature, grace, or glory, is his gift; in fine, they break forth in strains of the liveliest gratitude, praise, and benediction. Unite with those blessed spirits in honoring your Infant Saviour: beseech them to assist you in thanking the Eternal Father for giving you his divine Son, and to obtain for you grace to reap the fruit of his nativity.

3rd POINT. Consider—how the rays that proceed from the countenance of the Son of God, change midnight into a brilliant day, and a stable into a paradise. In the splendour of this light, see how the blessed spirits, after adoring the infant Jesus, offer themselves to be employed in his service according to his will, and particularly to announce his birth to men from whom he met so ungrateful a reception, and who were so unmindful of his benefits. Consider these pure intelligences as glowing mirrors, who receive the beams of the rising sun to reflect them upon us, that we may be inflamed with his love. Imitate their zeal for the salvation of souls, and the glory of their Saviour. Present your soul to this source of living light, as a pure mirror, to receive the rays of his brightness, and return them back upon your neighbour, to draw him forth from the darkness of sin into the admirable light of grace. Be not content to love Jesus yourself, desire that he be known and loved by all men. Make him known as much as you are able, infuse into all hearts his fear and love, and let your only happiness be to see him served and honored by his creatures.

FIFTH DAY OF THE OCTAVE.

An Angel is sent to the Shepherds.

1st POINT. Consider—who are they to whom the Son of God, the Sovereign Monarch of the universe, sends his heavenly ambassadors? To poor and obscure shepherds. Not only did they devote the day to labor, they spent the night in alternate watchings about the flock. Behold the persons whom the angels visit, and who receive the first favours from Jesus Christ. As he is infinitely humble, he willingly communicates himself to the poor and simple. This day he chooses shepherds as the evangelists of his birth: hereafter he shall make fishermen his apostles. O my God, how far removed are thy judgments from those of men! Who would not condemn the honors and riches of this world, seeing that the testimonies of God's love are for those who despise them? Why then despise the poor, since God honors them? Why shun the poor, whom the Angels visit? "For see your vocation, brethren, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble."* God prefers those who are poor, vigilant, and laborious. Are you of this number? Are you humble, poor, that is to say, detached from the world? Do you love labor? Are you vigilant in watching over those whom God has confided to your zeal? Say not that you are without a flock. The first flock with which God has entrusted you, is your own heart with all its affections.

* Cor. i. 26.

2nd POINT. Consider—the signs given by the angel. “You shall find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger.”* The humility of our Saviour, is manifested in his infant form; his poverty in his swathing bands; his mortification in his crib. Do you desire to know whether Jesus Christ is born in your soul? Examine if these three signs are to be found in you. Humility, poverty, and mortification, are the livery of the heavenly King, and opposed to the three marks of the kingdom of Satan, the prince of darkness, under whom reign in the world the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life. What confusion, O my Saviour, to bear a livery so contrary to thine! When shall I, in imitation of thee, love humility, poverty, and the mortification of the flesh, which thou hast chosen as thy inseparable companions during the whole course of thy life?

Open my eyes, O Lord, and those of all men, to discover the beauty of these three signs of thy empire. Holy Virgin, clothe us in the garments of thy Son; angels of heaven, obtain for us this favor; blessed shepherds, who have beheld him in the crib, may we with you bear this sacred livery, and love it in all those who are clothed therewith.

3rd POINT. Consider—the canticle of the Angels: “Glory be to God on high.” They publish the glory rendered to God in heaven by the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation, which is an inexhaustible subject of eternal praise. Never did the perfections of the God-

* S. Luke, ii. 12.

head shine forth with such splendour as in this mystery. The angels reiterate the oblation of that glory which his divine Son offers to him on earth. If the most excellent homage is that given by the humble, what humiliation can equal that of the Incarnate Word, laid in the crib with beasts! In fine, they offer him the glory which man should render to God made man for their salvation. "And on earth, peace to men of good will." The angels announce the peace concluded between God and man through the merits of Jesus Christ. Although this peace must be signed in his blood, and sealed with the cross, nevertheless the Incarnate Word having accepted the command with all the conditions required for our redemption, the angels already announce this heavenly peace to men of good will. Reflect attentively on it; it is not to men of learning, genius, riches, worldly greatness, or even of excellent natural endowments, the angels promise peace, but to men of good will, who correspond faithfully with the designs of God. He promises you *peace*, reserving to himself the glory. Be content with that which he gives you, and assume not the glory that belongs to him alone. What have you of your own but nothingness and sin? Preserve yourself in peace, and covet not the honor due to God, otherwise you shall possess neither one nor the other, but fall into trouble and confusion.

THE SIXTH DAY OF THE OCTAVE.

The Adoration of the Shepherds.

1st POINT. Consider—"Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which

the Lord hath showed to us. And they came with haste."* O wise shepherds, with what benedictions of sweetness have you been prevented! Abraham quits his country at the first command; the apostles abandon all, to follow their Master; and the shepherds, at the first word of the angel, quit their flocks and repair with speed to the appointed place. The inspirations of God are so many heavenly messengers inviting you to Jesus Christ; obey promptly, lest they grow cold in your heart, and remain without effect. Encourage yourself, saying: Let us go to Jesus. Let us run in the way of his commandments and counsels, as soon as the first ray of his grace shall have touched our hearts. When shall the fire of his love, and the light of his spirit make us renounce ourselves to seek him? When shall we have the courage to correspond faithfully with his call? Then and then only when the obduracy of my heart shall cease to make resistance, and when I shall become a man of good will.

2nd POINT. Consider—the devotion and faith with which the shepherds enter the stable; their happiness in finding Jesus with Mary and Joseph; they adore him with profound respect, offering their humble presents, more agreeable to the King of Glory than the richest gifts. The stable is now become a paradise of delights. "The Lamb is the lamp thereof."† Jesus is lodged between Mary and Joseph: Mary his dear mother, and Joseph the guardian of his infancy. O Jesus, the only love of Mary and Joseph, grant me mercy for their sakes. O Joseph and Mary, it is between you the shep-

* S. Luke, ii. 15, 16.

† Apoc.

herds find the infant Jesus, obtain for me grace to find him in the crib wherein he reposes, that is, in the poverty, humility, and sufferings which he has rendered amiable and adorable in his sacred person.

O my divine Master, I come with the shepherds to adore thee in the spirit of faith, simplicity, love, and reverence, in the desire and resolution of blessing thee eternally, and offering a perpetual sacrifice of praise. "Thou art my God, thou needest not my goods." It is the sacrifice of praise that is pleasing and honorable to thee. I will therefore sing a new canticle in the church of the saints, and praise thee in the midst of thy people.

3rd POINT. Consider—"And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God, for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told them."* How do you come forth from prayer? With what sentiments are you animated after the holy communion? You should always gather from your spiritual exercises these three fruits: a more ardent desire of God's glory, a more profound knowledge of your own nothingness, and a more firm resolution of correcting your faults. The zeal of the shepherds should be the object of your imitation, they published abroad with such fervor the wonders they had seen, as to delight the hearts of all. It is a sign you have profited by your devotions if you quit them with a lively desire to speak of God, to bear Jesus Christ into the hearts of others, and impart to them a high esteem of his greatness.

* S. Luke, ii. 20.

When, O Lord, wilt thou grant me the grace to do in effect what I have so often promised? "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall be ever in my mouth. My soul doth glorify the Lord: let the meek hear and rejoice. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us extol his name together."*

SEVENTH DAY OF THE OCTAVE.

The Blessed Virgin lays up all these things in her heart.

1st POINT. Consider—the object of the contemplation and interior occupation of the Blessed Virgin, is her only Son, and all that passes in his regard. She observes with great attention the words of God, the wonders she beholds, and the mysteries that take place, with all their circumstances. She bore the divine Word nine months in her womb; but during her whole life she bore him in her heart, attentively meditating on all his words and actions. Such should be the ordinary subject of your prayer, and interior occupation during the day. Jesus is your daily bread, the bread of life nourishing the soul to immortality. The fruit that Mary draws from this holy exercise is, to animate all her exterior actions with the spirit of prayer; to increase continually in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ; amassing within her heart a treasure of wisdom, afterwards to be communicated to the apostles and disciples.

* Ps. xxxiii. 2, 3, 4.

O heart of Mary, ark of the Testament, containing all that is most precious in heaven and earth, teach us so to meditate on the words and actions of thy Divine Son, and so to cherish them in our hearts, that they may not remain cold and obdurate; but that the lights and affections we derive therefrom, may animate all our actions, and serve us as powerful means to increase in sanctity and the edification of our neighbour.

2nd POINT. Consider—the sweetness, patience, and humility manifested by the Son and the Mother in this mystery. Compare your defects with their virtues, and enter into a spirit of holy compunction and confusion. Imagine your angel guardian reproaches you with the negligence in which you have passed this year, saying: “Well may you be confounded in considering the life of Jesus Christ, seeing the little care you have taken to conform to his example.”* Ponder seriously on the remedy to be applied to the defects and passions which have hitherto been most prejudicial to your soul, that you may guard against them in the coming year. How have they grieved the heart of Jesus! What a source of bad example to your brethren, and of injury to yourself! Renew the desire of faithfully fulfilling the duties of your state, and of daily advancing in perfection. Make a firm purpose to walk always in the presence of God, to cultivate a great purity of intention, seeking only in your actions to please his divine Majesty—to live in the bosom of his Providence, confiding in his bounty, receiving with resignation his divine appointments, and recurring to him in all your necessities—in

* Imitat. B. l. xxv.

fine, to treat with him in your spiritual exercises, with all possible reverence, attention, and devotion.

3rd POINT. Consider—the means of preserving charity with your neighbour. Make a firm resolution not to offend him in word or action, to guard your ears against all uncharitable discourse. Prefer yourself to none. Love and esteem all, treating with them in the spirit of meekness and affability, attracting hearts, not to yourself, but to Jesus Christ—consoling the afflicted and ministering to their wants with tender charity, supporting their defects with patience, remembering we live not with angels but with frail men. Purpose to retrench the excessive care of your body. Watch over the purity of your heart, fly the least sin, and efface those of inadvertence by sincere compunction. Close carefully the gates of your senses, that nothing may enter to disturb the peace of your soul. Examine whether you have advanced or receded in the service of God, in the victory over your passions, and the exercise of good works. Finally, offer these holy resolutions to Jesus Christ in the crib, imploring his benediction and grace for their perfect accomplishment. Invoke the protection of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, your angel guardian and holy patrons, so to pass the ensuing year, that if it be the last of your life, you may have the consolation of having spent it in the divine service.

O sweet Jesus, give me a tender love for thy holy infancy, and filial affection towards thy dear Mother. O Mother of Mercy, Mother of Jesus, obtain for me this grace, that I may place him as a seal upon my heart and my affections for ever.

FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION.

On the Spirit with which we should commence the Year, in imitation of Jesus Christ.

1st POINT. Consider—we should begin the year by an ardent desire of salvation. Meditate the sensible proofs given by Jesus Christ of his will to save you, in consecrating this first day by his blood, and taking the name of Jesus. With what fidelity should you not correspond with his mercy. The least action of Jesus Christ would have sufficed for your redemption, but in the excess of his charity he would employ for that end the labors of his whole life, and even the last drop of his precious blood. Why this superabundant redemption?—To discover to you the importance of your eternal salvation, and the magnitude of that evil which is inevitable, if you fail in co-operating with the designs of his mercy. Contemplate the blood of this adorable Infant, admire the charity that impels him to give you this early and precious pledge of his love. He is consumed with zeal for your salvation; what is your ardor for his glory? What for your own interest? Are you convinced that the only affair of importance is to secure a happy eternity; the only evil to be dreaded, the loss of your immortal soul? Endeavour this day to animate yourself with a new fervour, corresponding to that manifested by your Saviour in this mystery.

2nd POINT. Consider—we should begin the year by a true circumcision of heart, that is, a general mortification of all vicious inclinations. Jesus Christ

coming into the world to destroy sin, begins to efface it by the effusion of his blood. In imitation of his divine example, ground yourself solidly in that fear of God, which attracts the benedictions of heaven. "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom."* It should also be the beginning of your life. Resolve, at least, to enter on the present year in this spirit. "Who is the man that desireth life: who loveth to see good days?" "Keep thy tongue from evil and do good: seek after peace and pursue it."† It will not suffice to commence the year by mortification and the fear of God; you should continue it in the same spirit, "bearing always in your body the mortification of Jesus Christ."‡ He needed not circumcision, but he submits to this painful law, to facilitate for you the exercise of that mortification which should be continual, since concupiscence unceasingly shoots forth evil inclinations; and if you do not deceive yourself, you will always find something to retrench.

3rd POINT. Consider—we should begin the year by a fervent love of Jesus Christ, and a holy zeal for the glory due to his adorable name. The Jews seeing the Son of God weep at the tomb of Lazarus, said one to another: "Behold how He loved him."§ If tears are a mark of love, this day he sheds not only tears, but the first oblation of his precious blood, which shall one day be poured forth for you on Calvary. Behold how He loves you. How long will you be ungrateful? How long will you suffer self-love to rob him of the

* Ps. cx. 10.

† Ps. xxxiii. 12.

‡ 3 Cor. iv. 10.

§ 8. John, xi. 36.

first hours of the day, the first movements of your heart, whilst he gives you the first drops of his blood. "You say in the morning: to-day there will be a storm, for the sky is red and lowering,"* said the Son of God to the Sadducees. O Lord, if the morning sky forbode the tempest, how great is that which the commencement of thy life announces? How early dost thou embrace sufferings and the cross! Alas! how many years have passed away, and I have not yet begun to love thee.

Too long, O Lord, too long have I delayed: this day, this moment I renew the consecration of my entire being to thee. I come to thee indeed at the eleventh hour, the past is but the record, not merely of my sloth—but of my sins and infidelities, of the darkest ingratitude, the most wanton abuse of thy graces. I feel too well the utter worthlessness of the selfish and guilty heart I present to thee, but nevertheless, as thou camest "not for the just but sinners," as it was for the guilty thou madest the bloody oblation of this day, as there is no soul so dark and deformed but thy blood is capable of purifying—accept all that I have to offer—my tears—my compunction—my profound gratitude—my devoted love for the future. God of love, permit me to apply to myself, and aid me to reduce to practice, what thou saidst of Magdalen—that as my debt has been the most grievous, and as the exercise of thy mercy towards me in forgiving it has been the greatest, I may make the return of him "to whom most was forgiven," by loving thee more than others for the future—and commencing every day of my future life with the fervor and resolution with which I enter on this year.

* S. Matt. xvi. 3.

SECOND OF JANUARY.

Jesus Christ submits to the law of Circumcision, in obedience to his Eternal Father.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus Christ submits to the law of circumcision, in order to terminate the legal ceremony, and commence the evangelic circumcision, much more perfect than the former. That was only material, this is spiritual, and extends to all the powers of the soul, all the affections of the heart, all the movements of the body; in a word, to all that is contrary to the commandments of God and the evangelic counsels. By this ceremony He commences the office of Saviour, and renders homage to the sovereign dominion of his Father, in assuming the yoke of the law, and repairing the disobedience of Adam, the cause of the ruin of mankind. Learn from hence the obligation and motives for observing faithfully your rules. They proceed from God; the saints who instituted them were inspired by His Holy Spirit. He has called you to religion, to honor him by their observance. Your vocation and your rules are derived from the same source, and tend to the same end. In fine, on your rules is founded the kingdom of Christ. By them He reigns in your heart. By their observance alone can you render unto Him the service He requires. Your rules are the declaration of His will in your regard; all their authority, and that of your superiors, proceed from Him; consequently, if you neglect them, you despise His commandments.

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus Christ submits to the law of circumcision, though most painful on account

of His tender age and delicate complexion. "Looking on Jesus the author and finisher of your faith,.....that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds. For you have not yet resisted unto blood."* This law was ignominious with regard to the Son of God, since it was a badge of servitude and sin. O profound humility of the Holy of Holies ! O inconceivable pride of sinners ! Reflect seriously on your servitude to human respect. You fly the confusion of an ingenuous confession. You fear the humiliation of an abject office. Listen to the words of the Son of God. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words; of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his majesty."† This law was also burthensome in its precepts, for according to St. Paul, "Every man that circumciseth himself, is a debtor to do the whole law."‡ Enter into this sentiment. Be persuaded that you are no longer free either to transgress or dispense with the observance of your rules. Obey them, as if from imperative necessity. Holy Scripture says, that wisdom has chains and bonds. Fear not to bind yourself with them ; for they are most honorable chains, and bonds most salutary.

3rd POINT. Consider—the spirit with which Jesus Christ submits to the law of circumcision. The painful wound of the legal ceremony which he suffers for us, He changes into the unction of holy baptism, which is a spiritual circumcision of love. Therefore, St. Paul says, "You are circumcised with a circumcision not made by hand, in despoiling of the body of the flesh, but in the

* Heb. xii. 2. 3.

† S. Luc. ix. 26.

‡ Gal. v. 3.

circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism.”* Our Lord having discharged us from the Jewish ceremony, has imposed on us the obligation of a spiritual circumcision, to be accomplished by the aid of his grace, and the fervour of our love; an obligation we first contract at baptism, in which we are spiritually buried with Jesus Christ. This implies a previous death, for we entomb not the living but the dead. Learn from the example of your divine Master, a spirit of meekness towards your neighbour, while in your own regard you exercise the interior and exterior mortification without which you cannot observe your rules, acquire solid virtue, lead a religious life, or strive to attain the perfection of the state to which you are called. “I am the true vine,” says Jesus Christ, “and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he will take away; and every one that beareth fruit, he will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”† Take away, O Lord, all that is vicious or defective in my soul, but never suffer me to be separated from thee, as a dead branch fit only to be cast into the fire.

THIRD OF JANUARY.

On Devotion to the name of Jesus.

1st POINT. Consider—the sovereign perfections comprised in the adorable name of Jesus. It embodies, in a single word, the wisdom, goodness, sanctity, power, mercy, and love of God, combined and co-operating for

* Coll. ii. 11, 12.

† S. John, xv. 1, 2.

our salvation. It comprehends all the graces, virtues, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, which concur to the sanctification of our souls, since they flow to us from the plenitude of Jesus Christ as from an inexhaustible source. It signifies master, physician, father, judge, advocate, and pastor. It expresses all the benefits this divine Saviour has conferred on mankind, as the remission of sins, victory over temptations, the acquisition of virtues, the gift of perseverance, communication of glory, and possession of the supreme good. In fine, it represents the sufferings, ignominies, and torments that his ardent zeal for your salvation have caused him to undergo. When you hear, or pronounce this saving name, represent to yourself a God-man, amongst whose perfections mercy and love shine forth the most conspicuous. As God, "His mercies are above all his works."* As Son of God, He is called by excellence "The image of His Father's goodness."† As Son of man, He has been formed by the Holy Ghost, who is the spirit of love. Resolve to imitate the perfections which are signified by this adorable name; but particularly that devoted charity implied in the name of Jesus.

2nd POINT. Consider—true devotion towards the sacred name of Jesus, consists in an efficacious will to attain your own salvation. Thus you shall accomplish the most ardent desire of your Saviour. He has abundantly supplied you with means to accomplish perfectly the great, important, only affair of eternity. He has healed all your maladies, He has given you preventives and salutary remedies for every vice, He has

* Ps. cxliv. 9. † Sap. vii. 26.

delivered you from the power of hell, reconciled you with His Father, cancelled all your debts, removed every obstacle to your salvation, and by an excess of love shed even the last drop of His precious blood to satisfy the Divine Justice for your transgressions. But after all, if you make not good use of these graces, in vain has He suffered for you. O what confusion, to have hitherto served Him so tepidly! How fervently should you resolve to do penance, and henceforth to glorify his name, who *has loved you, and washed you in his blood.*

3rd POINT. Consider—that solid devotion towards the holy name of Jesus, consists in labouring seriously for the salvation of your neighbour. His laborious life and most painful death are incontestable proofs how dear the salvation of a soul is to the Son of God. How should you value a vocation, in virtue of which you are associated to the labours and sufferings of Jesus Christ, who places in your hands the diadem of his glory and the sceptre of his power, to regain for him the empire of hearts, and overthrow the tyranny of the demon. What shall be your remorse, should your brother perish through your negligence? What, if instead of saving souls, you become a scandal to them by your imperfections and defects? Compare your life with what the spirit of your vocation demands. You should be another Jesus conversing with men, edifying by example, instructing by holy conversation, charitably aiding them in all their necessities, sustaining them by continual prayer, and consuming yourself in their service by the ardour of your zeal. If hitherto you have failed, form the resolution to labour more faith-

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fully in future. Listen to the voice of the blood of Jesus that cries for mercy, and conjures you by the sweetness of his name and by the excess of his love, to aid him in the salvation of souls. If you co-operate with him, you shall be great in the kingdom of heaven. Your brother, whom you have saved, shall be your crown, and Jesus "thy recompence exceeding great."*

FOURTH OF JANUARY.

How we should bear the holy Name of Jesus.

1st POINT. Consider—it is the character of the predestinate to bear the name of Jesus: we may say that each is a vessel of election, like St. Paul, to bear this adorable name. They are signed with it in heaven, as a mark of glory and triumph; they are signed with it on earth, as a title of sanctity, and a mark of the warfare in which they are engaged against the powers of darkness. We also must bear it with them, if we desire to rank in their number. But to bear it worthily, we must enshrine it in our understanding, that it may enlighten us; for which purpose we should make it the object of our most frequent reflection. For amongst all the names which express the grandeur and the mercies of the Incarnate Word, this sweet name in a special manner brings to the mind the most exalted ideas of the Son of God; and most fully comprehends all his divine attributes, perfections, and benefits. Hence we may judge how holy and profitable is the frequent remembrance and meditation of this adorable name, which teaches us to revere, admire, and love all that is amiable and glorious in Jesus Christ.

* Gen. xv.

2nd POINT. Consider—we must carefully preserve this sacred name in our hearts, that they may be inflamed with the fire of his divine love. For it most powerfully excites the will to all holy affections, draws us to glorify all the perfections of the Son of God, to give him thanks for his benefits, imitate his virtues, fly all that is displeasing to him, and perform with devotion whatever is commanded by this amiable Saviour, whose name is sweeter than honey and the honey-comb. We must also engrave this sacred name on our arm, for the purpose of invigorating us to combat our enemies and practise good works. St. Bernard says, you possess a remedy for all your weakness in the holy name of Jesus. For being invoked in commencing your actions, it applies a preventing grace, to overcome your tepidity and inconstancy, and enable you to execute the good thoughts and holy desires it has given birth to in your soul. Therefore you should always bear it impressed on your heart and on your hand, in order that all your thoughts and all your works may tend to Jesus Christ as to their end.

3rd POINT. Consider—if this adorable name be imprinted as a seal on your heart and on your hand, it must necessarily be often on your lips, that is to say, you should frequently invoke and endeavour to impress it on the hearts of others. The name of Jesus is a sweet odour that only desires to diffuse itself. It is a spring of living water, which the more it communicates itself, the more clear and fruitful it becomes. It is a sun, whose light should have no other bounds than those of the universe. O what a favour, could we contribute to the glory of Jesus, and to the veneration due to his

sacred name! O that I could consecrate all hearts to his love, and all tongues to publish his glory! After this does my heart sigh—"In the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; and every tongue confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father."*

O Star of Jacob! O saving name of Jesus! auspicious Star, on which depends my happiness in life and in death. Let every action of mine be henceforth performed under thy influence. If I watch, let Jesus be before my eyes. If I repose, let it be in the heart of Jesus. If I walk, let it be in the company of Jesus. If I am fatigued, let Jesus be my refreshment. If I pray, let Jesus inspire and animate my prayer. If I am sick, let Jesus be my physician. And when I die, may it be in the bosom of Jesus, who is my life. O Sun of Justice, if thy rising betray that sanguine hue, how dark the sea of blood in which thou wilt set!

FIFTH OF JANUARY.

On bearing the holy name of Jesus, continued.

1st POINT. Consider—to bear worthily the sacred name of Jesus, it is necessary to be animated by the same spirit with which Jesus Christ has borne it. What virtues did He especially exercise from the moment he received it in circumcision? "He debased himself." Behold the spirit of humility. "Becoming

* Phil. ii. 10, 11.

obedient unto death." Behold the spirit of obedience. "Even to the death of the cross."* Behold the spirit of fortitude and constancy in the sharpest trials, and torments the most dreadful to nature. "Those who bear the name of Jesus," says St. Chrysostom, "need great strength, not only in time of trial, but also in the midst of peace. For they must be resolved to undergo great labours, annihilate themselves, and submit to obedience in things the most humbling and most opposed to the sentiments of corrupt nature. The name of Jesus is a name of salvation, it is therefore a sign of contradiction. We cannot save souls but by the cross; and it is through this sacred sign alone we find our own salvation. It is a name of sanctity and innocence. He that desires to be sealed with it must fly every vice, and therefore no effort must be spared to destroy it. In fine, it is a name implying every virtue. The practice of virtue is indeed difficult, but should we for that lose courage and fly the christian warfare, whose ensign is the saving name of Jesus, a name which inspires the spirit of self-sacrifice and devotedness?"

O Lord, suffer not that we should be thus ungrateful. Far from flying the confusion and opprobrium of the cross let us place therein our glory and our joy, because we are redeemed by the glory of thy name. In the cross is the salvation of the world, in the cross are all the benefits of grace and glory—in the cross, O Lord, is thy abode, and it is there I must seek thee if I wish to find thee.

Phil. ii. 7, 8.

2nd POINT. Consider—the signal graces and favors that God imparts to those who worthily bear this holy name. With it is found light, joy, peace, glory, and happiness eternal. If I possess any grace or virtue, it is that God “hath led me on the paths of justice, for his own name sake.”* If I hope one day to see the heavenly Jerusalem, that city of unchangeable felicity, it is because all my confidence is founded on the holy name of Jesus. “Thy eyes shall see Jerusalem, a rich habitation, a tabernacle that cannot be removed; because you have made account of my name, and that it is held in honor among you.”† Behold the true source of every heavenly favor. Ask the apostles to what they are indebted for the conversion of all nations: they will answer, that it is to the holy name of Jesus. Ask the martyrs whence they derived the strength that rendered them victorious over all the powers of earth: they will tell you, it is from the glorious name of Jesus.

3rd POINT. Consider—by the virtue of this holy name, which was engraven in their hearts, the saints arrived at the most eminent degree of grace and glory. For the name of Jesus possesses two admirable qualities: the one exterior, for effecting miraculous works; the other interior, for repressing the violence of passion and temptations of the devil, and leading us to the practice of all virtues. “When the saving name of Jesus presents itself to my mind,” says St. Bernard, “and when my soul is enlightened by its rays, my passions are immediately allayed, my sadness is dissipated,

* Ps. xxii. 3.

† Isaiah, xxxiii. 20.

and my temptations vanish. For in pronouncing this sweet name, I represent to myself a man meek and humble of heart, affable, kind, merciful, adorned with every virtue; at the same time, I call to mind, that this man is the Omnipotent God, who gives me the aid of his grace, while he proposes the example of his life for my imitation. In a word, it seems to me, that my heart is replenished with all good, when the name of Jesus sounds on my ear. Place it then, concludes this great saint, on your heart, on your lips, on your hands; seal with it the powers of your soul, and all your actions; bear it with you continually during life, to the end it may be uttered with your expiring breath, that it may accompany you into heaven, where you shall bless and glorify it for ever."

FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY.

On the glory of Jesus Christ in this Mystery.

1st POINT. Consider—this day is infinitely glorious to the Son of God, because on it He displays in an admirable manner his sovereign power in heaven and on earth. On earth he is adored by the Magi, and although but an infant, he causes Herod to tremble. In the heavens he creates a new star, whose miraculous beauty marks the wonders of his birth. The stars were created to enlighten us during the night; and Jesus Christ is come to shed on us his light amid the darkness of this world. The stars show forth their splendour in the heavens, but hide their virtue in the bosom of the earth, where they act by secret influences;

and Jesus Christ manifests himself to the blessed by the splendour of his glory, whilst he acts secretly here below on our hearts by the influences of his grace. Join with St. Augustin in the expression of his praise and wonder : O adorable mystery ! Jesus Christ laid in a manger, attracts the wise men from the east. He is hidden in a stable, and manifested in the heavens. He was manifested in the heavens, that all weak as he seems in the stable, he may be adored by wise men, and dreaded by the wicked. If while yet an infant in the crib, he causes the haughty powers of earth to tremble, what will it be when he comes in the power of his majesty to judge and punish the crimes of the world ?

Divine Source of Light, come, dissipate the darkness of my heart, and teach me to live in such profound humility, that I may stand without fear before thy dread tribunal, when thou shalt come to judge the living and the dead.

2nd POINT. Consider—this day is infinitely glorious to the Son of God, because on it he displays a wisdom all divine. He is adored by the wise of the world, who renouncing the prudence of the flesh to follow the lights of heaven, render homage to the Eternal Wisdom. He condemns the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world, and renders poverty precious, ignominy glorious, sufferings desirable, and all that men hold in horror, adorable in his own divine person. In fine, in Herod he confounds the wisdom of the world, making the artifices of the tyrant subservient to the manifestation of his glory. Thus all wisdom that tends not to

eternity, that seeks not Jesus Christ in the humility and poverty of the manger, but is confined within the narrow limits of self-love, is no better than false wisdom and real folly. Is it true wisdom to mistake the means for the end, to quit God for creatures, to know that there is a blessed eternity, and to think only on the present life, which endures but for a moment? "But where is wisdom to be found, and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof."*

Thou alone, O true Light of the world, hast dissipated this darkness, and manifested to us the mode and means of acquiring true wisdom. To thee, then, O Lord, I must have recourse, that I may become truly wise, not according to the world, but according to God.

3rd POINT. Consider—this day is infinitely glorious to the Son of God, because on it he displays the excess of his goodness. He is no sooner born than he begins to labour for the salvation of man, without exception of persons. He loves the poor, but he rejects not the rich. If he sends angels to the simple, he gives stars to the learned. He manifests himself first to the shepherds, says St. Thomas, because they represent the apostles, the pastors of his church; afterwards to the Magi, who represent the gentiles, and to holy Simeon, who represents the Jewish people. Admire a goodness that excludes none, that makes no exception of persons; learn to love all, and to desire that all may participate

* Job, xxviii. 12, 13.

with you in the benefits of God, and even receive more considerable ones, if it be for the glory of his name. If you possess any advantage over others, either of nature or grace, you will have to render a more rigorous account, because you are more strictly bound to the service of God. The gospel calls not the Magi kings, but sages ; because it was not their royal dignity conducted them to Jesus Christ, but that heavenly wisdom which teaches us to despise the world, and follow in all things the lights of grace.

O increated Wisdom ! who, by the light of thy example, hast confounded the prudent of the world, grant that this divine science may be infused into my heart, in order that by directing all my actions in the path thou hast traced, it may lead me to a happy eternity.

SEVENTH OF JANUARY.

The Vocation of the Magi.

1st POINT. Consider—that before the birth of Jesus Christ, the world was involved in darkness, crime, and misery. Those are the works of the devil, which the Son of God begins to overthrow by the vocation of the Magi, giving us in their persons faith, to dissipate the darkness of our minds ; His love and His grace, to destroy sin ; and the promise of salvation, to remedy all our miseries. Faith is signified by the star, which appeared at the moment of his birth, consequently, during the obscurity of night. Thus, when he would enter into our hearts, he first illuminates them with the rays of

faith, whose light discovers to us the truths of eternity, dispels the false maxims of a world that is buried in darkness. This star, says St. Augustin, is the herald of heaven that announces the birth of the Messiah. For He is a hidden God, according to Isaiah. If heaven had not declared his coming, who could have discovered that he was "The God of Israel the Saviour?"* Hence, without faith, neither human reason nor worldly wisdom can understand the ways of God and salvation. It is the herald of heaven, that proclaims to us the perfections, merits, inestimable benefits, and all the wonders operated by Jesus Christ. Bless God who has given you this divine light. Beseech him to increase it in your heart, to impart it to infidels who have never known, and to sinners who close their eyes to its brightness.

2nd POINT. Consider—the goodness of the Son of God appears this day in calling us in the persons of the wise men to his divine love. He attracts them sweetly by the beauty of a new star; He causes it to move before them, to smoothe the difficulties of their journey; and if he hides it for a time, to purify their love and faith, it is that its re-appearance may encrease their joy, and lead them at last to the treasure they are seeking. How excessive the clemency of our divine Lord! He is the first to make advances and seek reconciliation with us, promising to forget all our offences. He condescends to our inclinations, and adapts his lights and graces to the dispositions of our minds. The star represents the means by which God attracts us to his service. That was miraculous, and grace is supernatural. The star

* Isaiah.

appeared at the birth of Jesus Christ ; grace is given us in virtue of his incarnation. That miraculous light disappeared for a time ; grace is not always sensible, it is sometimes concealed for reasons to us inscrutable. In fine, the star conducted the Magi to Jesus Christ, and to the manger where he was laid ; grace conducts us to God and to the cross where he is found. Admire the hidden ways of Providence, that gives to each the grace necessary for salvation. How have you corresponded with that which you have received ? When will you be faithful to its inspirations ?

O divine star, conduct me to Jesus, guide me to the stable of Bethlehem, or the cross of Calvary ; lead me where thou wilt, provided I may find him who is my soul's treasure.

3rd POINT. Consider—this day truly terminates our miseries, and forms the commencement of our salvation. To-day we are received into the number of the citizens of heaven and the domestics of God. By a happy transition we pass from darkness into the admirable light of God. This day, those who were afar off approach unto God, sinners are received to pardon, and a harbour of safety is opened to the miserable. The Son of God, in destroying sin, has not freed us from the sufferings of this life, which are its fatal effects ; but he has taken away their bitterness, and changed the penalty of sin into the means of salvation. All our woes are consecrated and become beatitudes since he has assumed them in his own person. What is the felicity he reserves for us in heaven, if now he converts even the miseries of this life into a source of happiness ?

O my most amiable Saviour, happy are they who seek thee with all their hearts! Happy the condition of thy faithful servants! All things contribute to the good of those who love thee. Why should I complain of the evils I suffer, since by enduring them for thy sake they will conduct me to eternal happiness. Henceforth grant that I may never fly poverty, abjection, or pain, since therein thou art to be found. Let all the prosperity and honors of the world be the object of my contempt, and all my happiness be placed in thy service on earth, and the enjoyment of thee in a better world.

EIGHTH OF JANUARY.

On the co-operation of the Magi with the divine call.

1st POINT. Consider—in the vocation of the Magi the Eternal Father testifies his desire, that all men acknowledge his divine Son as their only Saviour, presenting to Him as such, the homage of their love and adoration. He wills that “all men be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth;”* that all learn to imitate the humility, charity, and other virtues which his beloved Son practises in the crib, and which are the necessary means established for their salvation. The heart of Jesus also burns with the same desire, which causes him to say interiorly, even from the moment of his birth: “Father,.....glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee.”† Admire the reciprocal love of the Father and the Son, and the love of both these divine persons for men; the one cherishes them as his brethren, the other

Tim. ii. 4.

† St. John, xvii. 1.

as the children of his adoption. O infinite charity ! How inconceivable, and how unmerited on our part are the favors of God ! What ingratitude, if we are not zealous for the glory of him who has so ardent a desire for our salvation.

2nd POINT. Consider—the obligation on our part to correspond with the merciful designs of God, and obey the grace that calls us to his service. Had the Magi neglected the star that appeared in the east, and the interior grace that secretly impelled them to seek Jesus Christ, never would they have found or enjoyed the happiness of possessing him. “Not I, but the grace of God with me,”* is the declaration of the Apostle. Weigh the reasons why God demands our free co-operation in the affair of salvation. He requires it to fulfil the wise order of his divine Providence, which conducts all things to their end by means conformable to their nature—to ennoble and perfect our liberty, by drawing us to seek after so exalted an object, as is the salvation and sanctification of the soul, and the possession of himself ; and to increase our glory, and the joy which we shall one day feel in having concurred to our own salvation, by labouring and co-operating with divine grace. Give thanks to God for the liberty with which he has endowed you for so holy an end ; be confounded for having employed so noble a faculty in base unworthy things, and often contrary to salvation. O how many degrees of glory you have lost by the perversion of your free will !

3rd POINT. Consider—the fidelity of the Magi in corresponding with the divine call. Of so many who

* Cor. xv. 10.

beheld the star, they alone are efficaciously moved to follow the inspiration of God. Others profit not of this grace, either from want of consideration, the want of esteem for so great a blessing, or a fear of the difficulties which may beset their path. Thus, "many are called but few chosen."* Consider the virtues which fidelity to grace produces in the Magi. They are yet but novices in the faith, they have only seen a new star in the heavens, and forthwith they resolve to submit to the empire of Him whom it represents. "We have seen his star—and we are come to adore him."† The ardor of their love impels them promptly to obey the divine inspiration, without regard to the difficulties they must necessarily encounter in quitting their kingdoms, and undertaking a perilous journey to a distant land. In this they also display great courage and strength of mind, which enable them to despise all human respect and temporal considerations, in order to execute the command of God. Learn to listen with reverence to the divine inspirations, to receive them with love, and execute them with prompt obedience; for the perfection of this virtue is diligence and fervor. Learn also, not to be led by the example of others, but by the ordinance of God in what regards his service and your own perfection; but consult in all things the light of faith, and the will of God, after the example of the Blessed Virgin, of whom St. Ambrose says, she was accustomed to consult God and not men. When, O Lord, shall all nations walk "in the brightness of thy rising," when shall all hearts follow that star of faith that has arisen upon them?

* St. Matt. xx. 16.

† St. Matt. ii. 2.

NINTH OF JANUARY.

On the Journey of the Wise Men.

1st POINT. Consider—how sweetly divine Providence provides for the Magi a guide, in the miraculous star which appeared to them in the east, and which was to them as the pillar of fire to the Israelites. With what joy they contemplate this heavenly light, with what fervor they pursue their journey under its influence! Every step is counted in heaven, and there is not one but merits a crown, more rich than earth could give. With what holy discourse they entertain each other, how ardently they sigh after the Messiah, what patience and courage they exercise in the difficulties of the way! Happy those who imitate their example, whose conversation is of heaven, whose desires tend to God alone, who quit all to find Him in whom all things centre; in fine, who live in such a manner that every affection of their hearts, every word and action of their lives, form so many steps towards a blessed eternity.

O my soul, let us go to God who is our centre; and whatever difficulty we meet, let us confide in his goodness; abandoning ourselves to his tender providence, whose care over us is so great that he employs all creatures, even the angels and stars of heaven, in our service.

2nd POINT. Consider—as the Magi approach the city of Jerusalem, the star disappears by a secret order of the providence of God, who by this trial disposes them to receive a grace the most signal, which is to find

Jesus and Mary. He would also oblige them to have recourse to ordinary ways, by learning of the doctors where the Messiah was to be born. Though deprived of their heavenly guide, the Magi are not discouraged, their faith and love are not abated. They fearlessly enter the city of Jerusalem, and even in the court of Herod enquire, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"* Learn from their example to bear the privation of interior light, when it occurs without cause on your part; but fear to lose it through your own fault. It often happens that we lose the presence of God in conversation with creatures, and that our good dispositions vanish. Avoid this snare; and if you perceive dissipation gliding in, promptly recall your wandering thoughts, and renew the consecration of your heart to God. The peace of the heart is a terrestrial paradise; it must be vigilantly guarded. Beware lest envy, jealousy, ambition, flattery, or any other irregular passion, get admittance. If you feel disturbed, be assured a serpent has found entrance, and cease not to pursue until you have driven it away. Happy the soul who is not enslaved to passion or the world, but who glories in belonging to God alone; it shall enjoy an uninterrupted calm, because it serves a master who is unchangeable.

3rd POINT. Consider—the Magi having learned from the doctors whom Herod had assembled, the place where, according to the prophet Micheas, the Messiah was to be born, and after having conversed in secret with the king, go forth without delay from Jerusalem,

* St. Matt. ii. 2.

on their way to Bethlehem, which had been pointed out as the birth-place of the Saviour. No sooner did they recommence their journey, than they again beheld the star, and "they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."* They break forth into the praises of God, who had restored to them this faithful guide, which happily conducted them to the wished for term of their journey, where they find Jesus and Mary. These should also be the object of your search and aspirations when you approach the holy communion; these you ought to seek in every action of your life; these you must necessarily find at the hour of death, or be for ever deprived of the possession of your Sovereign Good. O if you seek Jesus Christ with the faith, fervour, courage, and diligence of the Magi, you shall assuredly meet the same recompence. *Hasten by good works to redeem the time.* "Walk whilst you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you."† "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."‡

TENTH OF JANUARY.

On the Arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem.

1st POINT. Consider—how great the astonishment of the Magi on entering the palace which the King of kings had chosen for his dwelling. In selecting that gloomy cavern for his abode, he teaches us that the world into which he enters, is a den of sinners, who, by their idolatry and sacrilege, rob God of the glory that

* Math. ii. 10.

† S. John.

‡ Eph. iv. 30.

is his due ; a receptacle of vice, which he comes to purify by his presence. In fine, a place conformable to Calvary, which discovers the uniformity between the commencement of our Redeemer's life and its consummation on the cross. Who henceforth can form ambitious desires, seeing his King thus humbly lodged ? Shall nothingness believe itself to be something, seeing Omnipotence annihilated ? The star rests not over the splendid dwellings of the great ones of this world, for they are the retreats of ambition and luxury, where repose is troubled by a thousand chagrins ; but over the simple hut of poverty, where tranquillity and peace of heart are to be found. Henceforth I will fly the pride and ostentation of the world, and reject with horror all it holds in esteem, while my only desire shall be to imitate the poverty and humility of my infant Saviour.

2nd POINT. Consider—the manger where, as on a throne, the King of Glory reposes between two animals. The eternal Word dwelt in the bosom of his Father, where he could not be approached by men : love draws him to this lower world, where they may have free access to his divine person. He would for this end be born in an open stable, and laid in a manger. On this throne the Magi discover the true Solomon, and although they only behold an infant laid in a manger, nevertheless, prostrating themselves they adore him as their God. To the eye of faith the perfections of our divine Saviour shine forth in this mystery with peculiar splendour ; his wisdom, power, and mercy have here prepared a brilliant throne. But his charity, not content with being laid between two beasts, will after-

wards find, between two thieves on the wood of the cross, a still more glorious throne. How ungrateful and insensible must the heart of man be, if he love not a God who for his sake has wrought so many prodigies, and submitted to such amazing annihilation !

O living and life-giving Bread ! who hast descended from heaven, to be at once the pastor and the food of man ; grant that I may change the animal and terrestrial life I have hitherto led, into a life wholly spiritual and divine ; to the end thou mayest accomplish in my regard the promise thou hast made, that those who eat of this heavenly bread, delivered from the penalty of death, shall live with thee in the glory of eternal bliss.

3rd POINT. Consider—in the stable and the crib are found an example of the mortification of the senses which should distinguish the followers of the heavenly King. In this abode of poverty the eye meets no agreeable object whereon to rest. The smell is disgusted by the odour of this humid vault, and the sense of feeling suffers still more from the hardness of the manger, and the intensity of the cold. The Saviour of the world says, he is the grain of wheat, which being cast into the earth and dying therein, multiplies a hundred fold ; so it is in humiliation and abjection that christian virtues increase, and bring forth abundant fruit. He that has chosen so incommodious a birth-place, will not disdain to be born in our hearts, notwithstanding all our imperfections and defects. How good is God to the pure and upright of heart, since he withdraws not his grace even from the imperfect, nor deprives them of his love, unless they forfeit it by mortal sin ! Fatal evil, which gives

death to the soul, and renders it the enemy of God, I detest and renounce thee for ever. Ah ! who would be so lost to reason as to contract alliance with death, and take part with hell ?

O my Saviour ! grant that I may fear the thought of offending thee, beyond every other evil. May neither death, nor poverty, nor sufferings, nor confusion, ever separate me from thy love. May this holy love continually burn on the altar of my heart, and ever encrease its ardor in thy service. I resolve, O my Sovereign Good, to embrace purely for thy sake, whatever suffering thou mayest ordain, and to glory in my pains and my infirmities, that thy virtue, which is charity, may dwell in me eternally.

ELEVENTH OF JANUARY.

The Adoration of the Kings.

1st POINT. Consider—the star, pausing in its course over the stable of Bethlehem, descends in the atmosphere, and casts forth a more than ordinary brightness, as if to say, here you shall find the new-born king. The Magi are filled with astonishment on beholding this poor cave ; but when they enter and find Jesus and Mary, there issues from the countenance of the Divine Infant and his Mother, a light more brilliant than that of the star, which penetrating their hearts, discovers to them in this infant their God and their Saviour, in whom are hidden all the treasures of the divinity. The faith of these holy men has now attained its perfection. They had made an heroic act of that virtue, when they

had seen the star in the east, abandoning their country, in the belief that the universal king was born. They made one still more excellent, when the star disappearing as they entered Jerusalem, they persevered with unabated ardour in the object of their search. But the faith which they exercise on entering the stable far surpasses the former, for, beholding an infant laid in a manger, notwithstanding the appearance of poverty and weakness, they firmly believe him to be God and Lord of the universe. How penetrating is the eye of faith! To-day it discovers the majesty of God, under the impotence of an infant; afterwards it will recognize him through the ignominy of the cross!

2nd POINT. Consider—these words of the Evangelist: “And falling down they adored him.”* This prostration expresses the exterior act of adoration: the interior consists in the submission of their hearts to the Divine Infant. Humble yourself, if with the Magi you desire to contemplate the wonders of God. The wise man says, that the just falls seven times; but if natural weakness causes him to fall seven times, he as often prostrates himself by humility, says St. Isidore. How powerful the virtue of humility, since it is the means of attracting all the lights of heaven, and triumphing over all the enemies of salvation. Humble yourself, therefore, after the example of the Magi, if you desire, whether in prayer or holy communion, to know how good God is; but beware that your humiliation be not merely exterior—with the prostration of the body must be united the affection of the heart. If the interior

* S. Matt. ii. 11.

spirit animate not your exterior actions, they are of little value. If it is only the lips that pray, the hand that labors, or the body that is humbled, you lose more than you gain ; but even the least of our actions, if proceeding from the heart, become of inestimable value in the eyes of God.

3rd POINT. Consider—the joy of the Magi is consummated on finding Jesus and Mary. Then is accomplished in their persons the desire of David : “ I shall be satisfied when thy glory shall appear.”* The faithful of the ancient testament trembled with fear at the sight of an angel who spoke to them on the part of God. In the law of grace, the sight of a God does not terrify the Magi ; they are impressed with respect, but this profound reverence is accompanied with an inconceivable sweetness. Did I approach the divine mysteries, to participate of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, with a faith as lively, a humility as profound, what heavenly consolations would he impart in discovering to me the splendour of his divine perfections, hidden under the species, enveloped in the accidents of bread, enclosed in the tabernacles and ciboriums, as heretofore in the grotto of Bethlehem ! O wise Magi, the toils of your journey are well recompensed by the joy you experience in the presence of your sovereign good. Well may we address you in those words : “ Blessed are the eyes that see what you now see,”† and which see him also with the same faith, respect, humility, and love. We behold him daily on the altar, but may we not fear that this signal benefit will turn to our condemnation, for want

* Ps. xvi. 15.

† St. Luke, x. 23.

of a corresponding disposition on our part. What confusion should I not feel, to be so cold and tepid in presence of these august mysteries, where I see with my eyes the same divine infant whom the Magi beheld in the crib, yet testify as little respect as if I knew him not.

I bless thee, O my Saviour, and I invite all creatures to unite with me in giving thee thanks, for the light of thy divine faith imparted to us in the persons of the wise men. Grant, O Lord, that led by its beams we may perceive the most humble amongst men are the greatest in thy sight, and that what is despicable to the world is most valuable in thy estimation.

TWELFTH OF JANUARY.

On the Offerings of the Magi.

1st POINT. Consider—the Magi after having adored the Son of God, open their treasures and offer him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The holy Fathers say that these gifts which they draw from their treasures, denote those drawn from the treasury of their hearts, that is, the virtues exercised in this offering. What are the virtues treasured in your heart, as gifts to present to your infant Saviour? If you possess no rich present, offer at least all that you have. Beseech him, if he find nothing in your soul worthy to be presented to him, that he will at least take from it whatever displeases him therein. Be not of the number of those who, instead of offering gifts to God, rob him of the glory which is his due. Saint Chrysologus says : “ If

you adore God without presenting him some offering, your devotion is false." This is proved by the example of the Magi, prostrate before the crib of Jesus Christ. The gold which they offer, signifies their love; the frankincense which is used in sacrifice, denotes the devotion that burns on the altar of their hearts; and the myrrh marks the spirit of mortification, and the desire they conceived of imitating the divine infant in his extreme humiliation and sufferings. Say not that the Magi were rich, and that you have nothing worthy of being offered to the Son of God. Do you not know that time is a rich treasure, to each moment of which God has attached an infinite value. Consecrate it then entirely to Jesus Christ, and resolve to employ it solely in his service. Thus will you present him a most agreeable offering.

2nd POINT. Consider—the three gifts of the Magi mark the principal qualities they recognize and adore in the person of Jesus Christ. The sentiment of the church is, that gold signifies his royal power, incense his dignity as sovereign pontiff, and myrrh his interment. Purpose as the fruit of your reflections on these sentiments, to serve Jesus Christ faithfully as your God and your King, to love him ardently as your sovereign High Priest, who having once immolated himself for you on the wood of the cross, daily continues that sacrifice on the altar; and to imitate him as the victim who "was wounded for our iniquities and bruised for our sins." * Behold with what humility, reverence, and devotion, the Magi present their gifts. How ar-

* Isaiah liii.

dent the zeal which animates them to bear the name of this Divine Infant to the extremities of the earth, even at the expense of their lives. How fervently they desire the fulfilment of the prophecy of David: "He shall rule from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. All the kings of the earth shall adore Him; all nations shall serve him."—Ps. lxxi. 8. 11.

3rd POINT. Consider—with what looks of tender approbation the infant Jesus beholds the hearts and offerings of the holy Magi. We cannot doubt that while they presented their treasures, he bestowed on them gifts much more precious. It would not be suitable to the magnificence of the Creator to be less generous than his creatures. For their gold, He endows them with an admirable wisdom, to understand the most exalted mysteries of religion, and to impart to others this divine science. For their incense, He confers the gift of piety, which inspires them with a contempt of all wordly greatness, and entire devotedness to the service of God. For their myrrh, He infuses into their souls a sublime spirit of the cross and of continual mortification. We may believe that the Blessed Virgin, in presenting the Divine Infant to their embraces, was the organ through which they were replenished with the raptures and consolations of Heaven. How favorable is God to those who seek him, how sweet to those who find him, how munificent to those who give themselves to him without reserve! Guilty and ungrateful as you are, do you imagine that the Mother of Mercy, who is also come to seek sinners—will withhold that Divine Son from your embrace—if you be persevering in seeking, and generous in devoting all to Him?

OCTAVE OF THE EPIPHANY.

On the return of the Magi.

1st POINT. Consider—with what sentiments of devotion and love the Magi take leave of Jesus and Mary, and prepare to return into their own country. After rendering homage to the divine Infant, they remain some time at his sacred feet watering them with their tears. With what heavenly consolation was their hearts filled in speaking to their Infant Saviour; how ardent their thanksgiving for having being called by the miraculous star, and so favorably received in his divine presence; in fine, how devoted their protestations of eternal fidelity, esteeming it more glorious to be his vassals, than the monarchs of the world. Who can express the holy discourse which they hold with the Blessed Virgin, the sweetness with which she discovers to them the hidden greatness of her Son, and instructs them in the manner they should live on returning to their own country, conforming themselves in all things to the maxims of the faith they had received. How happy these holy Magi in finding so favorable an entrance into the hearts of Jesus and Mary! How happy in becoming the disciples of the one and the other. Willingly would they pass the remainder of their lives with the Son and Mother, if the same spirit which had led them to the crib, had not inspired them to withdraw and return back to their homes. Happy they who come from prayer and holy communion with the devotion of the sages, who listen to the divine instructions of the Eternal Wisdom, with an ardent desire to fulfil them; who remain at

the feet of Jesus and Mary as their beloved retreat, and who only go thence for their service, and under the guidance of the Divine Spirit. How far removed am I from these sentiments? To me the time of prayer and communion seems tedious; I approach with coldness, I withdraw hastily, I remain without respect, affection, or profit.

2nd POINT. Consider—the care of Divine Providence over the Magi. They are warned in sleep not to return to Herod, but to take another road back into their own country. Thus the heart of Jesus watches over you during sleep, and provided you seek and serve him generously, he will protect you from every unforeseen danger that may menace. We have unhappily strayed by sin, from heaven which is our true country. We have departed by the road of worldly pleasure, according to St. Gregory; we must return by that of tears and penance. Had the Magi sought Jesus Christ as a terrestrial king, they would have remained near his person: but because it is the King of Heaven they seek, and the pure performance of his will, they are satisfied with accomplishing that for which they are called, and then return without delay. They sacrifice to God the inexpressible happiness of remaining in the presence of their divine Master, in order to fulfil their obligations and the duties of their charge. Follow their example, not that of St. Peter, who desired to remain for ever on Thabor, lest you merit the same reproach which Timothy of Antioch made to him—“Peter, art thou so engrossed with thy own happiness, as to forget the conversion of the world to which thou art destined?” Whatever devotion you feel in

spiritual exercises, is but an illusion, if inordinate attachment to them cause you to neglect the duties of your charge.

3rd POINT. Consider—the admirable zeal displayed by the Magi when arrived in their own kingdoms. They publish aloud the birth of the great king; they relate how the star had guided, and pointed out to them the place of His dwelling, how they had seen the Divine Infant, and had found Him laid in a manger. It is supposed that they renounced their riches, to embrace the voluntary poverty they admired in Jesus Christ. Reflect on the progress in perfection made by these great saints in consequence of their faithful correspondence with the first grace of vocation. Animated by the zeal they had imbibed at the sacred feet of Jesus Christ, they persevered in their holy practices, laboring indefatigably for the conversion of their people, with a fervor that was at last crowned with a glorious martyrdom. What use do you make of so many examples, and so many sweet and powerful attractions to virtue? Do you not retrograde instead of advance in perfection? What tepidity and infidelity through the whole course of your life! When shall you give yourself to God alone? When life is about to terminate, will there be time to begin?

FOURTEENTH OF JANUARY.

On the Journey of the Blessed Virgin to Jerusalem.

1st POINT. Consider—how forty days after the birth of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin leaves Bethlehem

bearing the Divine Infant in her arms, to comply with the law of purification and presentation of the first born. With what sentiments of humility, obedience, resignation, gratitude, and love, does she offer this action to God in commencing her journey! We should never go forth but with Jesus and led by his spirit, that is to say, by motives of obedience and charity, uniting our intentions and actions with his; invoking his aid, and placing ourselves under his protection, that thus we may avoid the defects incident to human society, and draw fruit from our conversation with men. The Mother of God was not included in the law made for ordinary women, she was singular among mothers, nevertheless she ranks herself with the other daughters of Eve, to teach us that it is a glorious virtue to shew no singularity, and to conceal under ordinary observances an extraordinary merit. She neither anticipates nor defers a single moment the time prescribed by the law. How does this example condemn the facility with which we seek dispensations? Let us renounce this pusillanimity, disabuse ourselves of these false opinions, which lead us to solicit exemptions and affect privileges, as marks of superiority. Let us place our strength and our glory in observing the rules and ordinances of justice. The wicked have no other law than their power and strength. The servants of God say on the contrary: Let the law of justice be our strength; for that which is unjust must be pernicious.

2nd POINT. Consider—the Blessed Virgin advancing towards Jerusalem bearing the Divine Infant in her bosom, her eyes fixed on the divine object to which her heart is inseparably united. Follow them in

spirit, and contemplate Jesus in the arms of this blessed Mother as the living source of purity, that is one day to wash away the sins of the world in his blood; as a flaming torch scattering the fire of love with which this angelic woman goes to seek the lost drachma, that is to say, the salvation of our souls; in fine, as a treasure which shall afterwards pay the ransom of all men. All the days of our lives are days of purification, which shall not be accomplished until the moment of death. No one can enter the heavenly Jerusalem, unless he be purified from every stain. Hasten therefore to cleanse them in the fountain of life, that you may not be condemned to the expiatory fire. Remember you are a pilgrim upon earth, and the Son of God is the torch that enlightens you amid the darkness of the world. Walk whilst you have the light, advance in the pursuit of virtue, lest death surprise and compass you with its shadow, before you arrive at that degree of sanctity demanded of you by Almighty God. Jesus is the treasure you are to possess in eternity: let your heart desire and love but Him alone. What will it avail you to gain the whole world, if by losing him you incur a miserable eternity?

3rd POINT. Consider—the arrival of the Blessed Virgin in Jerusalem. With what joy she beholds, and how fervently she ascends the steps of the temple. How profound the respect and devotion with which she enters and prepares to offer her sacrifice. Never had so many prodigies met in this magnificent temple; never had God been so honored therein. Men eminently noble and virtuous had entered it, but never before a God-man. Virgins and mothers had presented them-

selves, but not a Virgin Mother. God had there received the homage of angels and men, but not that of an adoring God. Victims had been offered, but not the victim that effaces the sins of the world. Did you go to prayer, communion, and mass, with the same sentiments as the Blessed Virgin entered the temple, with what heavenly benedictions would you be replenished! In approaching to participate in the divine mysteries, you should say with the royal Prophet. "I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: We shall go into the house of the Lord." * What should be your reverence on entering the church, when you remember you are at the gate of heaven, in the company of angels, and in the presence of God himself, who beholds the inmost recesses of your soul.

How dare I appear before thee, O my God, covered as I am with the leprosy of sin, did not thy mercy sustain my hope, and encourage me to expose to thee my miseries? "Wash me yet more and more from my iniquities; and cleanse me from my sins."† O Blessed Virgin! purest of all creatures; may thy obedience be my example; and may the blood of thy divine Son be a sacred laver to cleanse me from every stain of sin.

FIFTEENTH OF JANUARY.

On the Purification of the Blessed Virgin.

1st POINT. Consider—the obedience and love the Blessed Virgin exercises in submitting to the legal

* Ps. cxxi.

† Ps. l. 4.

ceremony of purification. It is not the obligation of the law, but love, that impels her to this action; nevertheless she as strictly observes all the circumstances as if obliged thereto. During forty days, in compliance with the law, she denies herself the consolation of entering the temple. Being arrived in Jerusalem, she waits with the other women at the gate of the temple; she who was the sanctuary of the Divinity; she offers a sacrifice of purification, though more pure than the rays of the sun; she prostrates before the priest, who receives her offering with the accustomed prayers and ceremonies. She complies with this legal observance, to honor the sanctity of God, in comparison of whom the holiness of creatures is but as a shadow; to imitate the voluntary obedience of her Divine Son to the law of circumcision; for your example, and to teach you that there is no honor or glory equal to that of submitting to the law of God. If you believe this, whence comes the false shame you feel in the discharge of your duties? Whence such difficulty in obeying those whom God has placed over you? Why, on being constrained to execute their orders, or observe your rules, do you comply without exactitude, fervour, or fidelity?

2nd POINT. Consider—the humility and love of holy poverty, practised by the Blessed Virgin in this mystery. Her profound humility makes her desirous to pass for a weak and sinful creature, who needs this legal purification, notwithstanding her supereminent sanctity and the favor she enjoys with God, who grants us no grace but through her mediation. From a love of holy poverty she presents the offering of the poor, a

pair of turtle doves or pigeons, although she could have purchased a lamb, the usual offering of the rich, had she availed herself of the gifts of the Magi ; but she preferred bestowing those in alms, being content with the treasure God had confided to her care, in giving her his Divine Son, the true model of evangelical poverty and humility. Love these two virtues, if you love Jesus and Mary, and if you desire to be loved by them. Be poor in inclination and in spirit, that you may possess the heavenly treasure. Be humble amongst men, that you may be great amongst the saints.

3rd POINT. Consider—the piety and modesty with which this purest and holiest of creatures presents her offering. It is recorded that holy Simeon recognized the Mother of God, by a veil which distinguished her from the other women, and this veil was no other than her singular modesty ; for he judged that a modesty so amiable and at the same time so profound, like the veiled countenance of the Seraphim in the act of adoration, belonged only to that Virgin, who according to the Prophet, would conceive and bring forth the Messiah.

It is also believed that he beheld a heavenly light surround the Infant and His Mother ; this visible light was an exterior sign of the interior piety and sanctity that animated their sacrifice, and rendered it a spectacle worthy of angels and of the God of angels. Thus should you comport yourself before God and men, regulating your interior and exterior in so holy a manner, that your piety may render you pleasing in the eyes of God, and your modesty diffuse edification among men.

O Holy Virgin! while the contemplation of thy virtues fills me with admiration, I am confounded in considering the irregularity of my life, so opposed to the example thou hast given. When shall I correspond with the merciful designs of God? Alas! I know that which he demands of me; but I do not accomplish that which I know. I ought to appear in all my actions as one of thy children, but I am unworthy to bear that name. I am not worthy to be called thy child; but, O my sovereign Mistress, receive me into the number of thy servants, and suffer me under that title to dwell in thy holy house.

SIXTEENTH OF JANUARY.

On the Blessed Virgin presenting her Divine Son in the Temple.

1st POINT. Consider—the justice of the law which obliged the Jews to offer their first-born to God, in acknowledgement of the benefit received when the exterminating angel slew the first-born of the Egyptians. What more just than to acknowledge the favors of God, to offer him whatever we hold most precious, as a homage of thanksgiving, and to revere as holy whatever has been consecrated to his service? How many reasons oblige you to holiness of life, and an entire consecration to God to whom you belong by so many titles! He has created you to his own image; to praise him here, and reign with him for eternity. He has redeemed you with his precious blood, that you might serve him in holiness and justice, walking

in his presence all the days of your life. He has called you to the faith, to religion, or to an apostolic life, that you might sanctify yourself, and labor for the sanctification of others. He has nourished you with the bread of angels, placed you in his holy house, instructed and enlightened you by his inspirations, and admitted you to the society of saints. Whence is it, that consecrated as you are to God, you advance so little in virtue? Whence that he whom I have so dearly loved has wrought so little good, and so much evil in my house? When will you be worthy of your high vocation? Defer not a single moment to give yourself to God without reserve. Be you holy, because he is holy. Let your every act be generous, heroic, worthy of the God you serve; in fine, make him an unreserved oblation of that which alone he demands, in return for all his benefits, saying, "Son give me thy heart."

2nd POINT. Consider—the perfection with which the Blessed Virgin fulfils the law in presenting her only beloved Son to the Lord. The offering presented is a God-man, the compendium of all miracles, the source of every grace, the treasure of all the wisdom of the Creator, the first-born of the living, the object of the complaisance and love of the Eternal Father. This offering is presented by Mary, the most exalted, the most devoted, and most beloved of creatures. Jesus also offers himself to his Eternal Father, to lead a most painful life, and undergo a cruel and ignominious death. This oblation is made to render homage to God, as the first principle of all beings; to acknowledge his sovereign bounty, the source of all good; to satisfy his justice for the sins of the world, and to obtain from his

liberality all graces necessary for the salvation of mankind. Give thanks to the Son of God, who offers himself not only for the salvation of the world, but for yours in particular. Oh! could you enter into the hearts of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph; could you discover the holy affection they then entertained for you, with what fervor would you offer yourself for all that regards their honor and service! Remember you shall one day be arraigned before Jesus as your judge; endeavour to prevent that awful moment, by presenting yourself to him now as your Saviour, and rendering yourself worthy to be received by him with all that benignity which he manifests towards his faithful servants.

3rd POINT. Consider—the Blessed Virgin ransoms her Divine Son with five sickles, the price ordained by the law for all the first born. Admire the humility of the Son and the Mother, which redeems the Divine Infant at the price common to the lowliest of the sons of men. What gratitude do you owe to the Eternal Father, who is not only content with that which you can offer for his Son, but also gratuitously and without any merit on your part furnishes the price he demands? Should you not purchase such a treasure, even at the expense of your life? Nevertheless, you complain of the restraint necessary for subjecting your senses, which are the five sickles he requires, or for practising the five acts of virtue, which, according to the doctrine of the church, concur to a perfect conversion: these are faith, the fear of God, confidence in his mercy, contrition, and perfect submission to the divine law. The Blessed Virgin ransoms her Divine Son, that he may redeem you by the five wounds he will suffer on

the cross. Give thanks to this good Mother, who here performs the office of mediatrix, with so much charity. Spare no effort to preserve in your heart, the amiable presence and sweet conversation of Jesus. Be confounded in considering how base the objects for which you relinquish his love. Devote yourself wholly to Him who gives himself to you without reserve. You belong not to yourself, but to Jesus Christ, who for your sake delivered himself to the death of the cross.

SEVENTEENTH OF JANUARY.

On holy Simeon entering the Temple.

1st POINT. Consider—the happiness of this holy old man, who was chosen by God to manifest the birth of the Messiah, and the promise of the Holy Spirit, who had assured him he should not die until he had beheld the Saviour of the world. It is asserted that he received this revelation whilst meditating on the prophecy of Isaiah, which predicts that a virgin shall bring forth a son; and that asking of God the solution of this mystery, the Holy Ghost revealed to him that he should behold it before he died. Your rules and the commandments of God are so many oracles which assure you that you shall not die if you observe them: for our Lord hath said—“Do this and thou shalt live.”* Fear God and keep his commandments: for in this consists the happiness and glory of man. Oh! were you careful to observe your rules, how calmly would you look on your temporal death, and how little

* S. Luc. x. 28.

would you fear that which is eternal. Learn to rely on the promises of God, and the care he takes to glorify his Son, and manifest his grandeur amidst the most profound humiliation. Leave to him the care of your honor, he will preserve it so far as he shall judge necessary for his glory and your own good. The world promises much, and gives no real happiness; on the contrary, the benefits of God always exceed those which he promises. Holy Simeon not only beheld the Messiah, but received him into his arms, and offered him to God in the temple with an overflowing of heavenly consolation. Why are you not as faithful to the resolutions you make in the presence of God, as he is munificent in accomplishing all that he promises?

2nd POINT. Consider—the virtues by which the Holy Ghost disposed Simeon to behold the Messiah, and publish his greatness. He was just, acquitting himself faithfully of all his duties towards God and man. He feared God. The commencement of virtue is holy fear, and reverence for the divine majesty. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* He lived in expectation and desire of beholding the Lord, the consolation of Israel. He had persevered to an old age in this expectation. Therefore it is said the Holy Ghost dwelt in him. Learn from the example of this prophet, to prepare yourself by the exercise of these virtues for the visits of our Lord, particularly when he shall come to you at the hour of death. Be you also just, rendering to every one that which is his due. Fear God, shun the least faults, endeavour to walk worthily in the di-

* Ps. cx. 1, 10.

vine presence. Live in expectation and desire of being united with Jesus Christ in heaven: seek not the consolations of this world, they are transitory, base, and dangerous. Await those of heaven, with perfect resignation to the will of God, and an unshaken constancy in His service. "Expect the Lord, do manfully," in whatever place or employment you may be; whether with many or few consolations, "let thy heart take courage, and await the Lord;"* be faithful unto death, relying on the hope that you shall "see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living."

3rd POINT. Consider the spirit that leads holy Si-meon to the temple: it is a spirit of prophecy, which discovers to him that the Messiah at that same hour had entered the temple; a spirit of devotion and fervor that presses him to repair thither; a spirit of love that replenishes him with joy, while he holds in his arms the long expected Saviour. Reflect on the sentiments and affections which animated him, when possessed of this rich treasure, what passed between his heart and that of the infant Jesus, thus closely united to each other. With what disposition do you present yourself before God in prayer? How do you comport yourself during your spiritual duties? In what spirit do you enter the church, and approach to receive the holy communion? Is it with fervor, reverence, and application of mind? Beware of appearing there only in body, for instead of appeasing God, you would thereby draw upon yourself his wrath. Is not this the cause that you receive the precious body of Christ with so little fruit and conso-

* Ps. xxvi. 14.

lation? Apply an efficacious remedy to this disorder, form the resolution of following the guidance, and obeying the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Ah! if you put no obstacle to the operation of the spirit of Jesus, you would taste those delights which fervent souls find in Him, you would receive light to discover his admirable perfections, and those treasures of grace whence you may draw all the virtues you stand in need of; in fine, you would enjoy in this life a fore-taste of paradise, and a precious pledge of eternal happiness. "Send forth thy light and thy truth: they have conducted me, and brought me unto thy holy hill, and into thy tabernacles."*

EIGHTEENTH OF JANUARY.

On the Canticle of Simeon.

1st POINT. Consider—this holy and venerable old man, holding in his arms the Son of God, illuminated by the Holy Ghost, penetrates the hidden greatness of this infant. Admiration, joy, and love divide his heart; and amidst these ecstatic affections he blesses God in a short but admirable canticle, which comprehends three qualities discernible in the Saviour; that He is the salvation of the world, the light of nations, and the glory of Israel. The first demonstrates that he is the Saviour both of Jew and Gentile. The second, that He saves infidel nations, imparting to them the light of faith. The third, that he saves the faithful, replenishing them with grace and glory. Jesus Christ is the

* Ps. xlii. 3.

true light of our souls, therefore the Church, on the festival of the Purification, dispenses to her children, tapers blessed and lighted, emblematic of the interior light of faith, and the fire of charity which the Son of God came to enkindle on earth. The flame is the type of His Divinity, which is the eternal and increate light. The taper consumes itself in enlightening us: thus the Son of God employed his whole life, and gave the last drop of His blood for our salvation. The flame of the taper is nourished by the wax, and the wax derives all its brilliancy from the flame; so the fire of charity must be united with purity; and this virtue must be animated by the fire of charity, in order to possess either lustre or merit in the eyes of God.

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus Christ is the glory of Israel, because all the wonders which God had wrought to aggrandize that nation, regarded only this dear Son, in consideration of whom, He conferred innumerable favors and benedictions on the Israelites. Jesus Christ is the glory of God, of angels and men; the glory and ornament of the universe, out of whom there is no true honor. Those who withdraw from His obedience, whatever reputation they possess with men, shall one day appear as vile in their eyes, as at present they are in those of God. In vain does the sinner glory in his power and riches; in the service of Jesus Christ alone true glory consists. The honor of a christian is to know God and Jesus Christ his only Son; to preserve a pure conscience; to gain many souls to Jesus Christ; in fine, to suffer for His love, and to bear the cross here below, that he may one day receive a crown of glory in heaven.

O God, who art the glory of Israel, thou dwellest in the holy place, and iniquity is always displeasing to thee. Therefore the just who hope in thee shall rejoice; those who love thy name shall glory in thee, because thou wilt bless the just. Thou hast covered us with thy love as with a buckler. O Lord, thou art my protector, thou art my glory; from thee I have received all that I am.

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus Christ is the salvation of the world; his Father has sent Him to be the light of nations, and the universal cause of the salvation of man, even to the ends of the earth. “I have given thee to be the light of the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation even to the farthest part of the earth.”* Meditate the words of holy Simeon: “My eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.”† This divine Saviour is before you, He presents himself to your eyes. His light surrounds you, He offers himself to be your salvation. It is in your own power to become a great saint; for on his part he desires, He can and will effect it if you place no obstacle thereto.

O my Glory, my light, the Author of my Salvation! What shall I say at the hour of death, if I am found destitute of virtue, and devoid of thy grace? When thou wilt demand why I have not gained my salvation, what excuse shall I offer, or what shall I reply to thy reproaches, but that I willed it not. “O Lord, the God of my salvation; I have cried in the day, and in the night before thee. Let my prayer come in before

* Isaiah, xlix. 6.

† S. Luc. ii. 30, 31.

thee ; incline thy ear to my petition. For my soul is filled with evils ; and my life hath been nigh to hell.”* Save me, O God, for the waters are come in even unto my soul, I stick fast in the mire of the deep, and there is no sure standing.† Draw me forth from my misery, and suffer not that I lose the fruit of my redemption, which has cost thee so dear.

NINETEENTH OF JANUARY.

On the Flight of Jesus Christ into Egypt.

1st POINT. Consider—the flight of Jesus Christ is not an effect of fear, it is a mystery of wisdom. The Son of God, for your example, flies the world, and you seek it. He seeks you by an excessive mercy, and you fly from him by an excess of ingratitude. You renounce Jesus Christ with the world, rather than renounce the world with Jesus Christ. Form now a firm resolution to seek Jesus Christ in all things, and with him to flee the world. Flee it when it flatters, when it tempts, when it persecutes. Beware of following its laws, which are quite opposed to the maxims of the gospel ; do not permit yourself to be corrupted by its evil example ; seek not occasions (which occur but too often unsought) that would engage you to sin, and lead to the ruin of your soul. Your duty is to fly, or to combat if you cannot avoid them ; if you approach danger under a vain assurance of victory, you shall perish therein. “Whoever draws nigh to danger, shall not long be secure ; his ruin is inevitable, if he

* Ps. lxxxvii.

† Ps. lxxviii. 2, 3.

does not speedily withdraw," says St. Jerome. If it is objected, that this is not to combat but to retreat, reply with this holy doctor :—" I know my own weakness ; I will not hazard the combat on the presumption of vanquishing, lest I should lose the victory." What should oblige me to quit the certain for the uncertain? You who encounter the enemy may gain the victory, but you are also in danger of being overcome : as for me, I fly the combat as my only security against being vanquished. It is an act of folly to remain in danger when we have it in our power to escape it by flight.

2nd POINT. Consider—the flight of Jesus Christ is not a mark of human frailty, but of divine power. If He is omnipotent, why does He yield to the pride of Herod, whom He could instantly have annihilated? Why does He permit this early persecution? and why does He use such feeble means of defence? To teach us how to yield to our neighbour with charity and modesty, giving no person offence, neither resenting nor retaliating injuries, for it is better to suffer all things than to lose meekness and peace of mind. Admire the dispensation of the Eternal Father towards His divine Son, in exposing Him to the sufferings of a tedious exile ; meditate also the admirable submission and obedience which the Son renders to His Father. How willingly He sacrifices to God His Father His judgment, will, and all the powers of His soul, and abandons Himself unreservedly to the guidance of St. Joseph. Is it thus you submit to the commands given you on the part of God? Are you content that He dispose of you absolutely, and without regard to your inclinations? Would you have Him yield to your desires, rather than

resign yourself to his holy will? Wilt thou make void my judgment, and condemn me, that thou mayest be justified?*

Examine the words of the angel to St. Joseph. They inspire a most filial confidence: "Take the child and His Mother and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee."† It is an angel who speaks on the part of God. Why should we be anxious, since the angels of God are charged with all that regards us? He addresses himself to St. Joseph as guardian to the Son and His blessed Mother, teaching us to behold God in our superiors, and to live tranquilly under the special Providence of Him who governs us through their ministry. He says only: "Take the child and His Mother," for nothing can be wanting to him who possesses Jesus and Mary. O my Saviour, what can I desire beside thee, and without thee what can satisfy my heart? Grant me thy grace and thy love, and I desire nothing more.

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus Christ flies not to avoid death, but in order to give us life. Why should He fly death, since He entered the world but to die? He came on earth to teach us the way to heaven, to dissipate the darkness of idolatry, and to trace in his life a perfect model of every virtue: this he would not have accomplished, had he submitted to death in his infancy. He came to re-establish man in the state of grace from which he had fallen. He would die in the mature age in which Adam had been created, "in order to repair human nature in the perfect age in which man had been created, and to restore him to heaven such as he had given him to earth," says St.

* Job. xl. 3.

† St. Matt. ii. 13.

Chrysologus. Therefore he does not fly death, he only defers it; he yields not to Herod by constraint, but by design; his death must be the effect of his love, not of the violence of his persecutors. If he dies, it will not be by necessity, but by election; as St. Fulgentius says, "It is his own goodness, not the malice of others, that will deprive him of life. His death will not be the result of compulsion, but of his own free will." The blood of his infant veins is not sufficient to satisfy his desire of saving us and glorifying God. The stream thereof must swell for thirty-three years, that he may pour it forth more abundantly for our redemption. Reflect here on the words of Saint Augustin: that Jesus Christ is born in us by faith animated by charity. We must cause him to encrease, and suffer him not to die within us. When virtue is yet weak, Satan uses all his efforts to stifle it: we must oppose his pernicious designs, and employ all our care to preserve the life of Jesus in our souls. This we shall do by removing ourselves from peril; because he that looks upon danger with complacency or presumption, is almost as culpable as he that engages himself therein.

O true light of my soul, my strength, and my salvation, reveal to me the secret of my own weakness and corruption; and grant that I may every day so increase in the mysterious knowledge of self, as to be induced utterly to distrust myself, and to place all my confidence in thee—carefully flying every voluntary occasion of offending thee, but humbly relying on thy gracious providence when duty calls for my services or exertions.

TWENTIETH OF JANUARY.

On the Journey of Jesus Christ into Egypt.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus Christ willingly submits to exile with all its inconveniencies and painful consequences, to teach us detachment from the natural affection we bear to our relatives, friends, and the place of our birth; willingly to quit all that is most dear, when such is required for the service of God, or to fulfil the orders of his Divine Providence. “He who loves his country,” says Hugh of St. Victor, “is yet weak in virtue; he who considers the whole world as his own country, is already strong and generous. But he is perfect to whom all the world is an exile. The first is attached to the world; the second is disengaged from it; the third has extinguished all earthly affections in his heart.” In which class do you rank? Do you feel equally disposed for whatever place obedience shall appoint? Have you no tie to the earth? Do you only sigh after heaven, which is your true country and that of the saints? Accustom yourself to consider God every where; and you will feel indifferent to all places. St. Augustin assures us that in vain do they endeavour to banish a man who lives according to the spirit of christianity; because, either the whole world is his country, or it is his exile. “Do you seek a land of exile for a christian, first find a place where Jesus Christ is not. Can you banish a man who belongs to all countries in Jesus Christ, and who is every where a stranger according to the flesh?”

2nd POINT. Consider—the journey of these three holy pilgrims: accompany them in spirit, and endeavour

to render them all due honor and service. Compassionate the fatigue of the tender infant, of His Blessed Mother, and of St. Joseph who conducts them through the dreary desert, where the Israelites sojourned forty years before they entered the promised land. To what privations and difficulties were they not exposed in passing through the frightful solitude of the wilderness? Admire their patience, humility, and meekness. With what unbounded confidence did they repose in all their sufferings, on the paternal providence that extends to the birds of the air, and the humblest flower of the field, and which cannot forget those so much more beloved. The will of the eternal Father, and the visible presence of Jesus Christ, is to the Mother of this Divine Infant, and to His holy guardian, a living source of joy, that changes the desert into a paradise of delights. "To be without Jesus is a grievous hell, and to be with Jesus a sweet paradise. When Jesus is present, all goes well, and nothing seems difficult; but when Jesus is absent, every thing is hard."*

O Jesus, the brightness of eternal glory, the comfort of a soul in its pilgrimage; my tongue cannot express the sentiments of my heart; but my silence itself speaks to thee. "How long doth my Lord delay to come. Let Him come to me, His poor servant, and make me joyful: let Him stretch forth his hand, and deliver me, a wretch, from all anguish. Come, for without thee I can never have one joyful day or hour, for thou art my joy; and without thee my table is empty."

3rd POINT. Consider—why has the Son of God chosen Egypt for the place of His retreat? "Listen,"

* Imitat. b. ii. 8. b. iii. 21.

says St. Augustin, "to a great secret of providence. Moses had heretofore deprived these infidels of the light of day. Jesus Christ comes to restore it, and dissipate their darkness." Moses had stricken Egypt with ten fatal wounds : Jesus Christ comes to heal them by a single remedy. Moses had delivered the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, to lead them into the promised land : Jesus Christ comes to free His elect from the captivity of the demon, and conduct them to their heavenly country. In fine, Moses had overwhelmed the Egyptians in the Red Sea : Jesus Christ comes to wash their crimes in His precious blood ; and of the most superstitious of nations, to make them the most faithful and holy. " O change of the right hand of the Most High," says St. Chrysologus. This people which had been the persecutor of Israel, the cherished first-born of God, becomes the protector of His only Son. At the entrance of the Son of God into Egypt, all the idols fell to the ground, as the prophet Isaiah had predicted in these words : " Behold the Lord will ascend upon a swift cloud, and will enter into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence."*

O divine Saviour, who hast banished idolatry from the land of Egypt, when wilt thou destroy the irregular affections that are adored on the altar of my heart ? Come, Lord, break these idols ; prostrate them to the earth, that thou mayest re-establish the empire of thy love. Holy Virgin, who didst bear this divine infant into a foreign land, to sanctify it by His presence, hasten to visit us and bear Him into our hearts, that they may

* Isaiah, xix. 1.

be re-modelled according to His most holy heart, and that He may reign in them for eternity.

TWENTY-FIRST OF JANUARY.

On the sojourn of Jesus in Egypt.

1st POINT. Consider—the extreme poverty in which Mary and Joseph, with the Divine Infant, lived during their residence in Egypt. They subsisted only by the labor of their hands, and received from an infidel and barbarous people, who had little humanity, rather cause of suffering than assistance in their necessities : but they received all equally from the hand of God ; and as a devout author (Henry Morns) observes, “obedience was to them instead of riches, patience instead of temporal convenience, piety instead of consolation ; having the will of God always present to their minds,” in which they considered all their sufferings as in their first cause ; whence they drew, as well as from the inestimable treasure they possessed, an incredible sweetness which solaced all their pains. “Fear not, my son : we lead indeed a poor life, but we shall have many good things if we fear God, and depart from all sin, and do that which is good.”* “The only poverty that can injure, and that you should fear, is to be poor in merit”. (St. Bernard.) Want, hunger, labor, and the other privations of life are the sources of virtue, and the cradle of the servants of Jesus Christ, who was accompanied by them from the moment of His birth, to His last sigh on the cross. If you desire to follow Him,

* Tobias, iv. 23.

you must not fly them, since they are His inseparable companions. Do you desire to be perfect? St. Jerome says, "if you have wealth, give to the poor; if you have not, you are delivered from a great burden. Follow Jesus Christ, naked like himself. This is hard, it is high and difficult; but the recompence is great."

2nd POINT. Consider—the profound humility exercised by Jesus Christ in His exile. Why does he remain so long in obscurity, without other occupation than that of a mean artizan? It is to teach you contempt of the world, and perfect indifference with regard to whatever place or employment Providence may ordain. Self-love is grieved to remain inactive, in contempt or oblivion, whilst others enjoy honor and reputation. It complains that its talents are useless, that others of inferior merit are preferred; in a word, that it is forgotten as one buried in the tomb, or as a useless vessel. "I am forgotten as one dead from the heart. I am become as a vessel that is destroyed."* Let your reply be,—thus has the eternal Father treated His well beloved Son, and I am too much honoured in wearing His livery. If the apprehension of humiliation and confusion terrify you, say with St. Paul: "My life, my reputation, my honor, contentment, are not more precious than my duty. I am satisfied, provided I finish my course and accomplish the ministry I have received from the Lord Jesus Christ." Leave to the world its riches, honors, and all that can serve as fuel to concupiscence, and purchase christian liberty by that blessed commerce which renders the children of God rich in

* Ps. xxx. 18.

their poverty, strong in their patience, and illustrious in their humility. What can be more sublime than those great souls, who elevate themselves by holy desires, above all that is temporal, and aspire only to the love of the Creator; whom to approach, is to be ennobled; whom to fear, is to be replete with joy; and whom to serve, is to reign.

3rd POINT. Consider—the zeal that glows in the heart of this Divine Infant, and how He is occupied in his solitude for the salvation of men and the glory of God. He compassionates the blindness of those infidels, and deplores the loss of so many souls, whom the spirit of darkness holds captive, seducing them by his artifices into every crime. The honor which those idolaters render to their false deities, and the multitude of temples erected to their idols, increase the sorrow of the Son of God. He conceives an ardent desire to remedy all those disorders. He offers himself to his Father as a victim, to expiate the sins of the world; and if he defers the effusion of his blood, He already sheds abundant tears, which fall from his eyes as a heavenly dew, to produce in their season the flowers and fruits of every virtue. “In that day there shall be an altar of the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt. And the Lord shall be known by Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall worship him with sacrifices and offerings: and they shall make vows to the Lord, and perform them.”* Then Egypt shall appear as a heavenly city, peopled with innumerable martyrs, confessors, and virgins, leading a divine life, and performing on earth the functions of angels.

* Israel, xix. 19, 21.

O Divine Infant, generously hast thou requited the trifling services rendered to thee by this people! Come, Lord, and lodge in my heart, sanctify it by thy amiable presence, and make it fertile in good works, good thoughts and desires. O Blessed Virgin, this heart is thy conquest, vouchsafe to take possession of it in the name of thy beloved Son, and obtain that His love may burn unceasingly therein.

TWENTY-SECOND OF JANUARY.

On the Massacre of the Innocents.

1st POINT. Consider—in the person of Herod the evil consequences of unsubdued passion. He falsely imagines that the infant whom he seeks to destroy, comes to despoil him of his crown, whereas he is come into the world only to give us his heavenly kingdom. How short-sighted are the wise ones of the world! how late they discover their error! “He that dwelleth in the heavens shall laugh at them: and the Lord shall deride them.”* His passion is as cruel as it is blind, for one child that causes him to tremble, urges him to destroy about fourteen thousand, among whom is his own son. In fine he has no sooner conceived the suspicion that troubles him, than without other counsel but his ambition and fury, he resolves on, and executes the destruction of the innocents. Such is the effect of one ungoverned passion. Often a false imagination is sufficient to lead it to the greatest extremities. Beware lest this monster gain an empire over your heart; it

* Psalm iv. 4.

will destroy all the good you can perform, corrupt all your actions, deprive your soul of peace, and cause incalculable disorder in your whole conduct. How important to study the interior of the heart, and to gain an ascendancy over our passions. Crush them in the moment of their rising; have recourse to prayer, and form no resolution until you are restored to your wonted calm of heart. All is lost if we act under the influence of passion: the soul that abandons herself thereto, no longer fears either God, or man, the enormity of sin, or the chastisement it entails.

2nd POINT. Consider—in the persons of the innocent victims immolated to the ambition of Herod, a wonderful secret of Divine Providence, which permits that the persecution of creatures is often more useful to us than their false caresses. The cruelty of the tyrant, in depriving them of life, has made them instrumental in publishing the birth of Jesus Christ to the whole world; and placed on their heads the crown of martyrdom, since the Church honors them as the first fruits of Her martyrs. They die for Jesus Christ, and in his place, says the author of the *Cardinal Works*. They confess his name, says St. Chrysologus, before they have learned to speak, they glorify before they know Him, they pay him the tribute of their lives before they are perfectly conscious of the enjoyment, they attain the glory of martyrdom before they have learned to combat, and bear away the crown of victory from the enemy they have not seen. This, says St. Leo, is an effect of the omnipotence of Jesus, each moment of whose life is marked by miracles. He displays the power of his word, before his infant tongue can articulate; and already he

seems to say: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God."* He crowns them with a new glory, and he consecrates the commencement of their life by the first moments of his own, to teach us that no one is incapable of the divine favors, since even so early an age can acquire the glory of martyrdom. Fear not to suffer in his service, and be not surprised if he permits the innocent to be persecuted. It is for his own greater glory, for their greater good; it is to give an example to timid souls, and to animate the weak to the practice of virtue.

O Lord! what can I fear if I am faithful in thy service? No evil can happen to him who has the honor of serving thee.

3rd POINT. Consider—the sorrow with which Jesus Christ is penetrated at the death of these innocent victims, a sorrow the more sensible, as it is on his account they are thus cruelly persecuted. His heart endures a martyrdom in each of their persons. Learn from his example, to deplore the spiritual death of those who having long preserved their baptismal grace, fall unhappily into sin. Reflect on the ungrateful reception the Son of God meets at his entrance into the world. He comes to obtain salvation for men; nevertheless, scarcely is he born, than they begin to persecute him unto death. O wonderful dispensation of the wisdom of God! Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, yet wherever he enters war makes its appearance. As soon

* S. Mark, x. 14.

as he comes to take a new life in your soul, self-love raises all the passions to oppose his reign. In this encounter you cannot remain neutral. If you desire the life of Jesus Christ within you, make continual war on self-love, with which you can never form any truce. You have no sooner conceived a good desire, than the enemy opposes its fulfilment, and uses every effort to render your resolutions ineffectual. Already have you experienced this to your great prejudice. Prepare yourself therefore for the combat, that you may not again be surprised. Imagine you see Jesus Christ pointing to these martyrs, and hear Him say: "Unless you become as these little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."* Often repeat within yourself: "Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord: or who shall stand in his holy place? The innocent in hands and clean of heart"† If affliction overwhelm you, console yourself with this thought of the Royal Prophet: "He will not deprive of good things them that walk in innocence: O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee."‡ "Keep thou my soul, and deliver me. I shall not be ashamed for I have hoped in thee. The innocent and the upright have adhered to me: because I have waited on thee."§

TWENTY-THIRD OF JANUARY.

On the return of Jesus Christ from Egypt.

1st POINT, Consider—as Jesus Christ fled into Egypt at the command of his Eternal Father, so he returns

* S. Matt. xviii. 3.

† Ps. xxiii. 3.

‡ Ps. lxxxiii. 13.

§ Ps. xxiv. 20, 21.

into His own country in obedience to the same all-ruling will. This return teaches us that affliction shall not continue for ever; but that we must await the order of God for our deliverance. Whilst he is pleased to leave you in poverty, sickness, or dereliction, be not dejected, nor wearied with the endurance of your suffering: listen to these words which He speaks in your interior: "Remain until I shall tell you to return. Abandon yourself to me without reserve, in the least things as well as in the greater. I except nothing, but desire to find you in total disengagement. I have said, and I again repeat,—Give all for all." If it please divine goodness to lead you back from Egypt, by consoling and terminating your pains, regard in this dispensation only his paternal will. For as there is danger in being dejected in adversity, so you should fear a want of moderation in prosperity. Preserve yourself therefore in a holy indifference, which will dispose you to bless God equally in peace and in trouble, moderating your joy when heaven is favorable, and your sadness when it ordains you to undergo any humiliation. Let Jesus and Mary be your models; seek in them your consolation, make them the objects of your joy and your desires; learn of them to receive with respect all that comes from the hand of God. Render yourself worthy of his paternal care, and remain in repose under that Providence, which will make all things succeed for his own glory and your salvation.

2nd POINT. Consider—Jesus Christ returns into Nazareth, after the death of Herod and of those who sought his life. He will not establish his dwelling in your soul, until you have destroyed his enemies. He

goes not to Jerusalem, because the son of Herod then succeeded his father. He retires into Nazareth, which signifies a flower, because his delight is among the flowers of virtue, and he flies the tumult of irregular passions. We must die to ourselves, in order peaceably to enjoy the presence of Jesus and Mary. We must renounce all commerce with the world, if we would see Jesus Christ like Zacheus. We must say with holy Simeon: "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace; because my eyes have seen thy salvation."* This example, says St. Jerome, demonstrates that he who has the happiness to see Jesus Christ, should die to all that is earthly. For his love possesses a virtue that causes us to die to all our vicious inclinations. I say all; for frequently one succeeds another, as Archelaus succeeded Herod: and whilst a single passion reigns in the heart, Jesus Christ fears to enter, because he could not dwell there in security. How have the saints arrived at such perfection, and such intimate union with God? By the universal mortification of all earthly affections. We are too much pre-occupied by passion, and attachment to terrestrial objects. Seldom do we perfectly overcome a single vice: thus we always remain slothful and tepid in the service of God. Were we dead to ourselves, and interiorly disengaged, we could then taste divine things, and acquire an experimental knowledge of what passes in heavenly contemplation.

3rd POINT. Consider—Jesus Christ returns to his own country, after enduring a tedious exile, in order

* S. Luke, ii. 29, 30.

to deliver us from the eternal exile of the reprobate. As his patience under the privations of banishment should encourage us to undergo cheerfully the miseries of this life, which is truly an exile difficult to support, his return should dilate our hearts with joy, in the belief that heaven our dear country is open to receive us ; the angels expect our arrival, and the Son of God liberally offers us the graces necessary for happily terminating our journey. How happy is the man who, after enduring with perfect resignation all the pains of his banishment, is at length recalled to praise God eternally in his heavenly city ! As hitherto the voice of his sorrow resounded in these plaintive words : " Upon the rivers of Babylon there we sat and wept."* So beholding himself now at the end of his labors, in the joy of his heart he exclaims with the Royal Prophet— " I rejoiced at the things that were said to me, we shall go into the house of the Lord."† O most happy mansion of the city above ! O most bright day of eternity, which knows no night, but always enlightened by the sovereign truth ! a day always joyful, always secure, and never changing its state for the contrary ! O that this day would shine upon us, and all those temporal things would come to an end ! It shines indeed upon the saints, resplendent with everlasting brightness ; but to us, pilgrims upon earth, it is seen only as afar off and through a glass. The citizens of heaven know how joyful that day is ; but the banished children of Eve lament that this our day is bitter and tedious. The days of this life are short and evil, full of sorrows and miseries : where man is defiled with

* Ps. cxxxvi. 1.

† Ps. cxxi. 1.

many sins, is ensnared with many passions, attacked with many fears, disquieted with many cares, distracted with many curiosities, entangled with many vanities, accompanied with many errors. O! when will there be an end of these evils? When, Lord, wilt thou come and bring me forth from prison?*

TWENTY-FOURTH OF JANUARY.

On Jesus Christ going to the Temple at the age of twelve years.

1st POINT. Consider—the Blessed Virgin conducts the child Jesus to Jerusalem at the solemn festival of the passover, instructing us how to celebrate the appointed festivals in a holy manner, according to what our Lord has said by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah: “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath from doing thy own will in my holy day, and call the sabbath delightful, and the Holy of the Lord glorious, and glorify him, while thou dost not thy own ways, and thy own will is not found to speak a word; then shalt thou be delighted in the Lord, and I will lift thee up above the high places of the earth, and will feed thee with the inheritance of Jacob thy Father. For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”† Consider those days consecrated to the commemoration of the divine mysteries and benefits, or the virtues and rewards of the saints, as a special time of the most precious graces, and endeavour to profit of the admonition given by the author of the Imitation of Christ. “About the

* Imit. b. iii. 48.

† Isaiah, lviii. 13, 14.

time of the principal festivals, we must renew our good exercises, and more fervently implore the prayers of the saints. We ought to make our resolution from festival to festival, as if we were then to depart out of this world, and to come to the everlasting festival. Therefore we ought carefully to prepare ourselves at times of devotion, and converse more devoutly, and keep all observances more strictly, as being shortly to receive the reward of our labors from God. And if it be deferred, let us believe that we are not well prepared, and that we are as yet unworthy of the great glory which shall be revealed in us at the appointed time; and let us endeavour to prepare ourselves for our departure.

2nd POINT. Consider—the festivals solemnized by the church should constitute the delight of the devout soul, as they do that of God himself. For they are days especially devoted to prayer and all the works of piety, in which holy exercise, the true christian seeks his only felicity while sojourning in this *valley of tears*. Moreover, we know from the words of God himself, that his delight is to converse familiarly with the children of men, which he does more willingly on those days particularly dedicated to his divine service. Therefore we should employ them in such duties of piety, as are most pleasing to his adorable Majesty. Beware of indulging in your wonted imperfections, lest you change those days of benediction into days of wrath, and give a triumph to the enemies of your salvation. Days of tepidity and sin are festivals for them, as days of penitence and fervour are festivals for heaven. “We call the affliction of a penitent soul,” says

Origen, "a day of festivity. If then you would celebrate a heavenly festival, if you would give joy to the angels, afflict and humble your soul ; permit it not to indulge its desires ; suffer not that it expand and dissipate in vain amusements ; but afflict it, humble it, in as much as is possible." For, Lord, the sorrow of the contrite heart, is a confession of thy glory ; and the penitent recollection of sin, is the praise of thy infinite goodness.

3rd POINT. Consider—the Blessed Virgin leads the child Jesus to Jerusalem, to visit the holy places, to participate in the sacrifices, and to hear the explanation of the law. The Incarnate Wisdom enters the temple not to exercise the office of a master, but to teach you the duty of a disciple. From this example we learn to frequent the church ; that we may assist at the sacrifice, give ourselves to prayer, approach the sacraments, and attend to the word of God, to the end, we may be instructed in our obligations and acquire the science of the saints. For there is nothing more necessary for a blind man than to see. Blindness is a species of death and of perpetual mourning. The same may be said of the ignorance of holy things, which is to the mind what blindness is to the body. There is no deformity comparable to that of the soul which knows not God, and which the Holy Ghost has not illumined by his divine light. How are we enlightened but by the word of God ? And where shall we hear that word, but in the house of God ? There you learn what is necessary in order to repair the time you have lost in sin, to dispose yourself for death, and to gain a happy eternity. Therefore the Royal Prophet says, "How

lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. For the sparrow hath found herself a house, and the turtle a nest for herself where she may lay her young ones. Thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord, they shall praise thee for ever and ever. For better is one day in thy courts above thousands. I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than dwell in the tabernacles of sinners. For God loveth mercy and truth: the Lord will give grace and glory."*

TWENTY-FIFTH OF JANUARY.

On Jesus Christ remaining in Jerusalem while his Parents knew it not.

1st POINT. Consider—we learn from this mystery that many lose God by sin, and perceive not what they lose, nor understand the evil they commit. Therefore St. Gregory says, that Job compares sin to the moth, for as that insect silently destroys the most costly garments, so sin corrupts the unguarded soul before it is aware of its danger. Blinded by malice, which is as the moth of the soul, it sins without remorse, and is insensible to the loss of grace and spiritual life. How miserable the condition of man, when reduced to this pitiable blindness! He no longer seeks a remedy for the evil of which he is ignorant. He that feels not

* Ps. lxxiii.

his captivity, seeks not his ransom, says St. Bernard. He shall remain always a slave, he shall live and die in the slavery from which he shall never be delivered. Fly this criminal ignorance, close not your eyes through fear of beholding the evil you commit. Rather say with David: Lord, the image of my crime is always present to my mind; I look upon it with horror and detestation. Vouchsafe to turn thine eyes from it, O my God! To me it belongs continually to behold, but to thee to efface it, in thy mercy, for ever. If you desire that God would forget your sins, says Saint Augustin, bear them always in *your* mind; for if you cast away the remembrance, he will reproach you with it to your confusion.

2nd POINT. Consider—we learn from this mystery, that we may lose God without fault on our part. To lose sanctifying grace by mortal sin, is to lose God as sinners who live in his disgrace, the slaves of the devil. To lose the sweetness of the divine presence, and sensible devotion, by venial sin, is to lose God as the imperfect, who, though not his enemies, are cold in his love. To lose sensible devotion, and suffer the privation of heavenly consolation, without occasion on our part, is to lose God as the saints, who have frequently endured the most painful dereliction, without losing the peace of the soul and perfect submission to the divine will. Adore here the secrets of Divine Providence, which treats its dearest children with such seeming severity: this trial is permitted in order to strengthen the soul, and render virtue more solid; to prove its fidelity, and give opportunity of increasing merit by the practice of patience, resignation, confi-

dence, and frequent recourse to prayer; or to preserve it in profound humility, by the fear of having incurred this punishment by some hidden sin, according to the thought of the royal prophet: "Before I was humbled I offended."* "I give thee thanks that thou hast thus chastised me: thou hast done it for my good, to the end that I may serve thee with more exactitude and fervour." In fine, this trial is permitted to teach us, that if God thus proves his faithful servants, he will not spare us, who have so often provoked him to abandon us, and that we should fear, lest the bad use we make of his grace, and the little esteem in which we hold it, may draw down his punishment.

3rd POINT. Consider—we learn from this mystery, that to avoid losing God, or forcing him to forsake us, we must renounce all human respect, and remove every obstacle to his divine presence in our hearts. Meditate these words of the child Jesus: "Did you not know that I must be about the things that are my Father's?"† This is the first oracle of the Son of God recorded in the Gospel; and we should place it among the most important maxims of Christianity. How numerous the motives that should oblige the devout follower of Christ to the practice of meditation, pious reading, examens, participation of the sacraments, and other exercises of piety towards God, and to the flight or removal of every impediment to the fervent performance of these holy duties. These motives are, the will of God, the example of Jesus Christ, our own spiritual advancement, fidelity, gratitude, the necessity we are under of

* Ps. cxviii. 67.

† S. Luke, ii. 49.

doing penance. To what tend so many lights, inspirations, resolutions, protestations, sighs, and prayers, but to lead to the practice of this grand maxim? And when shall you reduce it to practice, if not when the occasion is presented, and God solicits and presses you to return to him? Shall it be said that you are so ungrateful as to prefer a human respect, a trifling interest, a vain phantom, to considerations so pressing and so important? “O senseless Gallatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth?”* “I am in fear for you, lest perhaps I have laboured in vain among you.”†

TWENTY-SIXTH OF JANUARY.

How we lose the Child Jesus.

2st POINT. Consider—in what manner the Blessed Virgin lost the child Jesus, notwithstanding the intense love that inseparably united her heart to that of her Divine Son: reflect also, how that which occurred without any fault on her part, is frequently a chastisement to you. The Blessed Virgin lost her beloved Son, in returning from Jerusalem, which is situated in the most elevated part of Judea, and in going down to Nazareth. This circumstance gives occasion to remark, that the loss of grace, or at least of the presence of God and of his divine consolations, frequently occurs when after being cleansed from sin by penance, and united to God in the holy communion, we by little and little fall from the fervor of our charity, and return to

* Gal. iii. 1.

† Gal. iv. 11.

our accustomed vices and defects. "When an unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeketh rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out. And coming he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is made worse than the first."* It avails little that the house is cleansed or ornamented; if the impure spirit find it empty, he enters without resistance. A man who after a good confession, and holy resolutions of amendment, forgets the sentiments with which God had inspired him, neglects pious exercises, and commits venial sin without scruple, flatters himself with a false peace, saying, there is nothing to fear. For shortly Satan, who sleeps not, will surprise him, and become master of his house, because it is empty. In vain has this man cleansed his conscience, and laboured for a time in the work of his perfection. He has only prepared a dwelling for the devil. How important to renew frequently the resolutions formed in the presence of God, and preserve diligently the fervor with which we have entered his service.

2nd POINT. Consider—the Blessed Virgin lost the child Jesus, reasonably supposing that he accompanied St. Joseph, and the other persons of their own country who were returning home. This supposition that her Son was amongst those of their own company, was not a false judgment or error, but a probable opinion, on

* S. Matt. xii. 43, et seq.

which she might prudently act. We may lose God either through ignorance, inadvertence, or error. We may lose Him through ignorance, because we do not possess that superabundant light, with which the greatest saints were not always favored. We may lose Him through inadvertence and want of vigilance, which only becomes culpable when proceeding from negligence. This obliges us to excuse many defects from which even the most holy persons are not exempt, but which nevertheless do not render them displeasing in the eyes of God; and this should teach us to avoid many rash judgments, by interpreting their actions, as charity and christian simplicity demand. We may lose God through error, which is inseparable from sin, according to St. Augustin, who says, that no one can lose God unless he be deceived, nor seek him again unless prevented by the light which warns and discovers to him his loss. For alas! who would lose God did he seriously consider the consequences? And who would neglect to seek him, did he understand what he had lost. "He that loseth Jesus loseth exceeding much, and more than if he lost the whole world. Whoever finds Jesus, finds a good treasure, yea, good above all goods."*

3rd POINT. Consider—the Blessed Virgin loses the child Jesus through the confidence she reposes in Him. Knowing that he is omnipotent, and that nothing can happen but by his appointment or permission, she fears nothing on his account: and this her confidence proves in the sequel to be just. Ours on the contrary is often defective. For many lose God by a presumptuous con-

* Imitat. b. ii. 8.

fidence, persuading themselves there is nothing to fear, even where the danger is most imminent. Some ground their hope of salvation solely on the goodness of God, as if their own efforts were not required for its attainment. Some again confide too much in themselves; others are not sufficiently diffident of creatures, and perish in the danger they do not apprehend. O how many are thus deceived and lost! They imagine such a contract to be lawful, such a vengeance but a just defence, such a society not attended with danger, such a companion to have no evil intention; and relying on this false confidence which flatters their inclinations, they are drawn to the precipice into which they unwarily fall. Those who enjoy prosperity, either spiritual or temporal, are more subject to this defect, and lose God more easily than others; some because they do not sufficiently fear temptation, and distrust their own weakness; others because they forget eternity in the smiles of fortune, and the flattering caresses of the world. The means of avoiding all these snares, is to walk in the Divine presence with filial reverence and holy fear, assiduously cultivating an intimate union of heart with God. "O God, be not thou far from me: O my God, make haste to my help."* "For behold they that go far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that are disloyal to thee. But it is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God."†

* Ps. lxx. 12.

† Ps. lxxii. 27, 28.

TWENTY-SEVENTH OF JANUARY.

How we should seek the Child Jesus.

1st POINT. Consider—as soon as the Blessed Virgin perceives the absence of her Divine Son, she defers not a moment in seeking Him, to teach us with what diligence we should seek God, when He withdraws from us, or when we have lost Him through our own fault. “Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day. For His wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance he will destroy thee.”* The present moment of life is the only one in your power, and it may perhaps be your last. If you allow it to pass, and death to surprise you, the evil is irremediable. Man, while in this life, may lose God, which is his greatest misery; he may also find him, which is an infinite happiness; but he must seek him, as did the Blessed Virgin, without delay. For if he is surprised by death, his loss is irreparable. Beware then of abusing the time, and slighting the grace with which you are now favoured. “Say not to thy friend: Go, and come again: and to-morrow I will give to thee: when thou canst give at present.”† Jesus Christ, the best of friends, demands your conversion; He solicits your return at the present moment. Wherefore, O sinner, do you delay to be converted? Fear you not that a sudden death may deprive you of the day you destine to that all important work? What time would be too long to labour for a happy eternity? Employ therein at least the short remainder of your life. “Give not thy

* Eccles. v. 8, 9.

† Prov. iii. 28.

honor to strangers and thy years to the cruel.”* The time you trifle away, is an offering made to the demon: that consecrated to penance, is a sacrifice presented to Jesus Christ. Which merits the preference? There is no place for deliberation; there is no time to be lost. If you neglect the present favourable opportunity, you may perhaps incur the punishment denounced by our Lord in those words: “You shall seek me, and shall not find me: and you shall die in your sin.”†

2nd POINT. Consider—the diligence with which the Blessed Virgin seeks her Divine Son, is an effect of ardent love, which impels her to return without delay, and allows her no repose, until she had found the object of all her desires. Thus should we seek the child Jesus, when we have lost either the sweetness of His presence, or his holy grace. “You shall seek me, and shall find me: when you shall seek me with all your heart;”‡ that is to say, with a heart inflamed with love, an undivided heart that desires God alone. St. Bonaventure says: “You must seek God in your entire heart, and not in some part thereof. You must seek him like him who said: I have sought thee with all my heart.”§ You must seek Jesus Christ, as he who seeing his house on fire, seeks the water to extinguish the flame; as he who hungers seeks bread; in fine, as one condemned to death seeks to preserve his life. For Jesus Christ is the fountain of living water, that extinguishes the fire of concupiscence, which menaces our destruction. He is the bread of heaven, giving strength to walk in the

* Prov. v. 9.

† St. John, vii. 8.

‡ Jer. xxix. 13.

§ Ps. cxviii. 10.

way of God's commandments. Finally, He is the life of our souls, delivering them from eternal death: we cannot avoid this but by seeking him with fervor. "I am thine, save thou me: my face hath sought thee: thy face, O Lord, will I still seek? Turn not away thy face from me, decline not in thy wrath from thy servant."* "Uphold me according to thy word, and I shall live: and let me not be confounded in my expectations."†

3rd POINT. Consider—the heart-felt sorrow with which the Blessed Virgin seeks her divine Son, although she had lost him without fault. How much more cause have you to be afflicted, when you have lost him by sin? Properly speaking, we can only lose God by sin: and we can find him only by penance. The children of Israel found "in the Red Sea a way without hinderance"‡ to travel to the promised land: and sinners, in order to arrive at heaven, have no other road than the sea of penance. God approaches us by this sea, and by the same we arrive to him, says an excellent author. "Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in many waters: and thy footsteps shall not be known. Thou hast conducted thy people like sheep."§ Penance is the way by which God conducts us to heaven, "by the hand of Moses and Aaron," that is to say, by the confessor or director to whose care we are committed. Through the waters of compunction you must open a path to the heavenly land of promise. O blessed tears, that purify the soul from sin, detach it

* Ps. xxvi. 8. 9.

† Ps. cxviii. 116.

‡ Sap. cxix. 7.

§ Ps. lxxvi. 20. 21.

from the earth, and exalt it to heaven, even to the glory of the saints! Ah! unhappy sinners, you know not the price of your tears, you are ignorant of their value. You weep over imaginary evils, whilst you behold with indifference the supreme evil of sin, which your tears could blot out for ever. The only sorrow worthy of our tears, is that with which we should seek Jesus, when we have lost him by sin. To repair this loss, sin must be annihilated by contrition, and its traces effaced by the tears of sincere compunction.

TWENTY-EIGHTH OF JANUARY.

How we may find the child Jesus.

1st POINT. Consider—there are three classes of persons who seek God, and like the Blessed Virgin, find him after three days. Thus penitents find him after three days. The first of these days is one of contrition, it is a day of affliction, atonement, and reconciliation. Sin has three fatal effects: it sullies the soul, it offends God, and draws on the sinner an eternal punishment. Contrition effaces the stain of the soul, appeases the anger of God, and satisfies for the penalty of sin. Of this day it is written, “The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness.”* The second is that of confession, a day of confusion, of which may be said—“all the day long my shame is before me: and the confusion of my face hath covered me.”† This shame is most salutary; it mainly contri-

* Ezch. xxxiii. 12.

† Ps. xliii. 16

butes to our justification. The third is that of satisfaction, which obliges the penitent to renounce sin, to despoil himself of the old man, and to burst asunder the bonds of evil custom. Such is the first condition "of them that seek the face of the God of Jacob."* Such are the three days after or rather during which they find him. For if contrition be sincere, it is a day of grace to the sinner, who, enlightened by the true sun of justice, comes forth from the darkness of sin, in the same moment in which he detests it from a motive of pure love. O blessed day in which we are born to grace, day of salvation that rejoices heaven, and puts a period to our miseries; day on which we may say with the apostle: "The night is passed, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light."†

2nd POINT. Consider—the just seek God, and find Him also after three days. The first is that of evangelical poverty, which should be voluntary, humble, and perseverant. Some, says S. Bonaventure, are willing to be poor, on condition that all their wants are supplied; they despise riches, but will not endure contempt. Those persons find not Jesus Christ. Evangelical poverty cannot exist with pride, and the love of our own ease and convenience. It is better to be rich and humble, than poor and proud. The second is that of purity, wherein the mind and heart must be detached from all that is earthly, and this can only be effected by the perfect mortification of the senses. As these are the ordinary channels of temptation, the combat against

* Ps. xxiii. 6. † Rom. xiii. 12.

them is the most frequent and dangerous. Whence it is that few so guard their senses, as always to come off victorious, and be able to say: "Lord, O Lord, the strength of my salvation: thou hast overshadowed my head in the day of battle. Give me not up, O Lord, from my desire to the wicked."* The third is that of obedience, which includes not only the execution of what God, by the voice of superiors, enjoins, but also entire submission of will and judgment, without murmur, excuse, or delay, in fine, without regard either to our interests or inclination. This is the day of which Solomon says "an obedient man shall speak of victory."† Happy they who follow Jesus Christ into the desert during these three days: they shall enjoy the sweetness of His presence, and the effects of His mercy; to them will He address these words: "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest the faint in the way."‡

3rd POINT. Consider—the perfect seek God, and find him after three days in a manner still more excellent. The first is that of repose; St. Augustin says, that a good conscience alone is tranquil; and this tranquillity is the repose of the heart. "Carry no burdens on the Sabbath day, and bring them not in by the gates of Jerusalem;"§ that is to say, beware of charging yourself with worldly occupation, and let nothing that could sully or trouble the imagination, enter through the senses, which are the gates of the

* Ps. cxxxix. 8. 9.

† Prov. xxi. 28.

‡ St. Matt. xv. 32.

§ Jer. xvii. 21.

soul. For in order to give yourself to contemplation, you must be exempt from the embarrassment of temporal affairs, and the phantoms of sensible and corporal objects. The second is that of mental prayer, a day of light which comprehends thought, meditation, and contemplation. When the soul rests not on a particular object, but passes from one to another, it is called thought; when it applies to a specific subject, it is meditation; but when it is fixed on an object that elevates it above itself, it is contemplation. O happy day which commences with thought, which increases with meditation, and which contemplation beholds in all its brightness! This day is followed by a third, which is that of divine love, when the devout soul, contemplating the sufferings of her spouse, the benefits she has received, and the eternal glory he has prepared for her in heaven, breaks forth into this admirable canticle: "Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see King Solomon in the diadem wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the joy of his heart."* Which is the day of joy to the heart of Jesus? The day of eternity, wherein he has prepared a crown of glory for those who seek him; for then he will rejoice in the happiness of his elect. Which is the day of joy to the heart of the spouse? That on which she finds Jesus, after having sought him with love. In him she finds the source of all delights, an abundant and eternal recompence.

* Cant. iii. 11.

TWENTY-NINTH OF JANUARY.

On the means of preserving Jesus in the soul.

1st POINT. Consider—it suffices not to find Jesus ; we must preserve and guard him in the soul. The Blessed Virgin having found her divine Son, separated no more from him ; the spouse in the Canticle also, having found her beloved, let him into the house of her mother, that is the church, with a firm resolution “not” to “let him go.”* If you desire to retain Jesus Christ, you must resolve with courage to undergo the difficulties you shall have to encounter. The heavenly spouse loves your soul, and desires to establish therein his eternal dwelling ; but there are many enemies who would banish him thence : the world, the flesh, the passions, would force him to yield to them his place. The tepid and inconstant soul betrays her spouse, she chases him from her heart and gives entrance to the enemy, from whom she suffers a thousand outrages. The faithful and courageous soul, on the contrary, says with the spouse—“I found him whom my soul loveth : I held him, and I will not let him go.”† Though hell should rise up against me, it shall never separate me from him. Neither the caresses nor the menaces of the world and the flesh shall shake my resolution. Jesus Christ shall reign in my heart for ever. “Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”‡

* Cant. iii. 4.

† Cant. iii. 4.

‡ Romans viii. 38. 39.

2nd POINT. Consider—that in order to preserve Jesus Christ in the soul, you must be vigilant, and and place around him faithful and generous guards. “Behold three-score valiant ones of the most valiant of Israel, surround the bed of Solomon, all holding swords, and most expert in war.”* These valiant warriors who watch around king Solomon during his repose, are good thoughts; serious consideration on the truths of eternity; firm and efficacious resolutions, which guard the soul wherein God reposes, holding it in humility and fear, defending it against the illusions of the evil one, fortifying and establishing it solidly in virtue. “The soul,” says St. Augustin, “that is sustained by holy thoughts, becomes impenetrable, invincible, and immutable: the spirit that is fortified by a lively faith in eternal truths, remains firm and unshaken by all the terrors with which it is menaced by the world and the devil.” If, therefore, the world and the prince of darkness by whom it is governed, would tempt you to vanity, pleasure, and desire of riches, attach yourself firmly to Jesus Christ, watch around him, preserve inviolably the promises you have made; embrace him so closely in the arms of an humble confidence in his goodness, and respectful fear of his judgments, that all the powers of hell shall not change your purpose. “He that fears God,” says the Royal Prophet, “his heart is strengthened, he shall not be moved until he look over his enemies.”† For according to the height of the heavens above the earth, he hath strengthened his mercy towards them that fear him.”‡

* Cant. iii. 7. 8.

† Ps. iii. 8.

P. cii. 11.

3rd POINT. Consider—if notwithstanding all your vigilance, Jesus withdraws from you his sensible presence ; you have, indeed, cause of affliction, but not of discouragement. The absence of Jesus though short, seems long to the soul that loves. Yet he often subtracts the sensible consolation of his presence, in order that you may seek him with more fervour, and find him with more joy. According to St. Augustin, that which you seek with difficulty, you find with pleasure. Would you more promptly find, and carefully preserve the presence of Jesus Christ, prepare for him a dwelling in your heart, listen attentively to his words, and follow his divine example. For this end have recourse to his blessed Mother, and endeavour to merit her favor. From her you shall learn to meditate, and to practise all that her divine Son has taught by word and example. For “Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.”* From her maternal heart you must draw this treasure. Listen to her words—“I love them that love me : and they that in the morning early watch for me, shall find me. With me are riches and glory, glorious riches and justice.....I walk in the way of justice, in the midst of the paths of judgment, that I may enrich them that love me, and fill their treasures.”†

THIRTIETH OF JANUARY.

Reflections on the foregoing Mystery.

1st POINT. Consider—“They found him in the temple.”‡ They seek the child Jesus “among their

* S. Luke, ii. 19. † Prov. viii. 17, 18, 20, 21.

‡ S. Luke, ii. 46.

kinsfolk and acquaintance," but they find him not. If *you* would find him, "Forget thy people and the house of thy Father, and the king shall desire thy beauty, for he is the Lord thy God, and the people will adore Him."* The more you sequester yourself from creatures, the more easily you shall have access to him. He is lost among your friends and relatives, he disappears in the crowd, says the learned Wm. D'Auvergn. He is found at Jerusalem, not in Capharnaum, which signifies a place of delights. He is found in the temple, not in the palaces of the great, there the Magi sought him in vain. He is found among the doctors, not amongst those engrossed by secular business. O good Jesus, if you are not found amongst your own relatives, how shall I find you among mine? If your Blessed Mother with difficulty found you, though pierced with sorrow, how shall I find you amidst vain joy and idle gratifications? Therefore I renounce all human consolations, the vain pleasures, and the deceitful peace which the world presents, that by the exercise of compunction and penance, I may find the true peace and heavenly consolations which the presence of Jesus imparts to the penitent sinner.

2nd POINT. Consider—"They found Him sitting in the midst of the doctors."† Jesus ranks himself as a disciple, although He is the teacher of the doctors, who should appear amongst them as a sun in the midst of the planets. His modesty gains their hearts; while they are lost in admiration of the wisdom and discretion manifested in His questions and replies. His zeal

* Ps. xliv. † S. Luke, ii. 46.

obliges him to give them proof of his doctrine, and his humility conceals the supreme dignity of his divine person. He stood not in need of their instructions, since he is "the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world."* But you required this example, to teach you not to confide in your own prudence in whatever regards your actions or conduct; because, as St. Bernard says, he who trusts to his own counsel becomes the disciple of a fool. "I conjure you, my brethren," says this same father, "you who are as yet but newly born to grace, and who have not sufficient experience to distinguish between good and evil, that you do not follow your own judgment or abound in your own sense, lest you be surprised by the wily enemy who unceasingly lays his snares for souls aspiring to perfection." Be persuaded that you are not capable of being your own guide. Besides the grace of God, you stand in need of human aid. No one is so weak, no one so easily vanquished, as he who has no guide or director in the ways of God.

3rd POINT. Consider—"And his mother said to Him: Son why hast thou done so to us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."† This is not the murmur of impatience, it is the overflowing love of a mother's heart, expressing its feelings of mingled joy and sorrow in this tender complaint. But the Son of God replies: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"‡ O sublime words! The Virgin did not comprehend their full extent. For who could thoroughly understand the

* S. John, i. 9.

† S. Luke, ii. 48.

‡ S. Luke, ii. 49.

honor and service due to the infinite Majesty of God? What created intelligence conceive all that the only-begotten of the Father should do and suffer for such an object? Know you not that I am come into the world only to re-establish the reign of my Father's glory, and obtain the salvation of mankind? Are you ignorant that this is the only important "business," and that we must forsake all when the divine honor and service demand the sacrifice? Alas! how few are able to comprehend the extent of their duty towards Almighty God! O Christian! you are born for a nobler end than to be a slave to this world! your occupation is to serve God, to secure the salvation of your soul, to labour for heaven and eternity. God is your Father. He has given you a temporal, and promises you an eternal life. What should you not do for the love of such a Father, who seeks only your benefit? Should you not value the honor of serving him above all things? Yes, this is the *one thing necessary*. For "what will it avail a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Is not God more than the world, the soul more than the body, eternity more than time?

My Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who wert sought during three days by thy Blessed Mother, and at length found by her in the temple, grant me grace ardently to desire thee; earnestly to seek, and happily to find thee. Ah! Lord, who givest to those that ask, who art found by those who seek, and who openest to those who knock, refuse not to me what thou hast promised to all; and since thou hast given us an example of perfect obedience, in returning to Nazareth with thy blessed Mother and St. Joseph, and

being "subject to them," grant that I may so bend my own will, as to subject myself perfectly and devotedly to thee, and to every human creature for the love of thee.

THIRTY-FIRST OF JANUARY.

On the return of Jesus Christ to Nazareth.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus Christ by an admirable secret of His wisdom, would remain unknown to the world until the age of thirty years. His whole life is admirable, and difficult to comprehend; but His hidden life, from the age of twelve years until his baptism, is totally unknown. For what mind can conceive the works he wrought during that time, since the Scripture is silent thereon? We must then adore in silence, and say with the prophet: "O Lord, how great are thy works! thy thoughts are exceeding deep."* "I shall not die, but live; and shall declare the works of the Lord." I desire life only that I may bless thee, O my God! "Open ye to me the gates of justice: I will go into them, and give praise to the Lord."†

O true Wisdom, teach me the happiness and benefits of a hidden life, and so imprint the lesson on my heart that I may place all my ambition in following thee in that obscure and lowly path.

2nd POINT. Consider—how astonishing that the Son of God should so abase himself, as to pass for the

* Ps. lxxxxi. 6.

† Ps. cxvii. 17, 19.

son of an artisan and to exercise his trade. This humility is more to be admired than the most splendid actions of his life, and the greatest of his miracles is to have performed none during so long a space. Ah ! Lord, is humility so difficult of practice, that the most high must descend to teach us its importance? Yes, truly, there is no virtue more exalted or more difficult. He that despises himself, and desires with his whole heart to be despised by others, is arrived at the highest and most difficult degree of virtue. Believe not that you have made any progress until you have arrived at this point. Obedience necessarily springs from a humility so profound, and notwithstanding the dignity of his divine person, He permits himself to be absolutely governed by his Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, while on his part he obeys with indifference, fervor, and perseverance.

3rd POINT. Consider—four other virtues taught by Jesus Christ during his hidden life. The first is the flight of idleness, the mother of all evil. He was occupied exteriorly in the labor of his hands, and interiorly employed in praying for sinners, treating of their salvation with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and regulating the whole economy of the house of God. The second is liberty of heart, and disengagement from all the cares of the earth ; for he was in the world as if he were not : his heart, intentions, affections, thoughts, and desires, were infinitely elevated above all that is perishable. The love of solitude and silence are the other virtues which the Son of God practised in Nazareth. There are two solitudes : that of the heart, which can be preserved by a holy recollection of mind, even amidst

the conversations and business of the world; that of the body, which actually separates us from human society, but is of little effect if not united with the former. Behold your divine model in Nazareth, where he leads a retired life: what miracles might he not have wrought? what conversions could he not have operated by the efficacy of his word? Nevertheless he remains in silence, to teach you a love of retirement, from which you should go forth, only when the glory of God or the salvation of your neighbour require it. Fear not to lose your time or bury your talents. Jesus lost nothing of the fruit of his labours, by remaining in solitude until his thirtieth year. "Whosoever, therefore, aims at arriving at internal and spiritual things, must, with Jesus, go aside from the crowd. No man is secure in appearing abroad, but he who would willingly lie hid at home. No man securely speaks but he who loves to hold his peace. In silence and quiet the devout soul goes forward, and learns the secrets of the scriptures. It is better to lie hid, and take care of one's self, than neglecting one's self, to work even miracles. It is commendable for a religious man to go seldom abroad, to fly being seen, and not to desire to see men."*

FIRST OF FEBRUARY.

On Jesus advancing in wisdom, age, and grace.

1st POINT. Consider—"And Jesus advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and man."† Meditate on the motives which oblige you to increase in

* Imitat. b. i. 20.

† St. Luke, ii. 52.

grace and virtue, amongst which the most important is the example that Jesus Christ has given you during his life. Ponder therefore the words of St. Bernard. Did he who was the Creator of the world and of man, remain inactive whilst he conversed visibly with men? The holy Scripture testifies that He travelled through the provinces of Judea, doing good to all, and healing those that were sick. St. Paul says Jesus Christ was obedient even unto death; let your progress, O christian, have no other bounds. However long therefore your course may be, unless you persevere unto death, you shall not gain the crown. The Son of God will not rank you amongst the conquerors, he will not hold you as a disciple or as a friend, because you dishonour him by your pusillanimity. The disciple who makes progress, does honor to his instructor. Whoever does not advance in the school of Jesus Christ, is not worthy to have him for a master, much less for a friend. St. John assures us that he who would live in Jesus Christ, should walk as he walked, and follow the path he has traced. He has run on with ardor as a giant in his course; if then, we would not be put to confusion, we must also run in his footsteps. Glorious Conqueror, who hast promised to draw all unto thee, when thou shalt be elevated on the cross, draw me after thee; grant that I may draw others, and that together we may run in the odour of thy virtues.

2nd POINT. Consider—three general means of advancing in perfection, comprised in these words of the prophet: “Blessed is the man whose help is from thee: in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps, in the

vale of tears, in the place which he hath set.”* “Blessed is the man whose help is from thee.” This is the first and most necessary ; because, without the divine assistance we can do nothing. What am I of myself, says St. Augustin, but a blind guide that conducts to a precipice ; having nothing of my own, but an unhappy facility of casting myself into peril. “In his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps.” This second means of advancing consists in the love of God, which is seated in the heart. For the progress required of us is no other than this love. Ascend towards God by loving him : the more you love, the nearer you approach unto him. But remember the place of your dwelling “is a valley of tears,” and that paradise to which you aspire, is a place of eternal and inconceivable delights. Suffice it to say, “it is the place which he hath set” for his friends. These words comprise the third means of advancing in perfection : that is, a spirit of compunction, by which we despise this world, and sigh after heaven. Our love in this life is not one of enjoyment, but of suffering ; it is nourished with tears and ardent desires, which are inflamed in proportion as charity augments. When this divine virtue is perfected in the soul, she says with the apostle : “I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.†”

3rd POINT. Consider—three other particular means for advancing in perfection, according to St. Charles Borromeo. “If you desire,” says the saint, “to advance in a christian life, and perfect yourself in the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in his virtues and spirit, observe these

* Ps. xxxiii. 6, 7.

† Phil. i. 23.

three points of practice.' In the first 'place, imagine each day that you then only commence, and endeavour to serve God with as much fervor, as if it were the first of your conversion. Secondly, never lose the remembrance of the divine presence ; for, as the apostle says, ' We are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels and to men.'* Finally, let all your actions tend to God by a pure intention, and an ardent desire of fulfilling his will." Never say it is enough ; be not satisfied with what you are, if you would attain that to which you are not arrived. From the moment you conceive a vain complaisance in yourself, you arrest the progress of your perfection, and instead of advancing you retrograde. Those who relax in the desire of advancing, are in danger of falling : our spiritual advancement depends principally on the desire of advancing in the way of virtue ; and as St. Bernard says, " the indefatigable care we take, and the continual efforts we make to perfect ourselves, is a state of perfection ; and the desire of advancing a notable progress." Earnestly implore this grace of God, in the words of St. Augustin : " My Lord, I love thee ; and if I love thee not as I ought, grant that I may love thee more. O love, ever burning and never extinguished ; my God, who art charity itself, enkindle in my heart that divine fire which animates thy saints and transforms them into thee by love."

* Cor. iv. 9.

SECOND OF FEBRUARY.

Festival of the Purification.

1st POINT. Consider—this day is accomplished the prediction of Malachy: “Behold I send my angel, and he shall prepare the way before my face. And presently the Lord, whom you seek, and the angel of the testament, whom you desire, shall come to his temple.”* Who is this sovereign ruler, but Jesus Christ the Lord of lords, who wields the sceptre of the universe? He whose coming kings and prophets have desired to see, and after whom they have ardently sighed. In this quality you should receive him this day as king of your heart, which is his temple, with all the respect and joy his presence deserves. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion: shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy king will come to thee, the just and Saviour.”† The sick rejoice at the rising of the sun, captives at the presence of their liberator, the poor at the sight of a rich treasure which they unexpectedly find. Behold the sun of justice who comes to you, with healing on his wings—behold your treasure, your liberator, whom so many saints have desired and expected, without the favor of participating in this happiness. Should not your joy at least equal their desires? “And nevertheless,” says St. Bernard, “to whom amongst us does the possession of this grace cause as much joy, as the sole promise of it hitherto enkindled in the yearning hearts of the saints of the old testament?” “I feel confounded,” says this father; “and the sorrow that this tepidity causes me, is such that I can-

* Mal. iii. 1.

† Zach. ix. 9.

not restrain my tears." Deplore with this holy doctor your own coldness, and endeavour to awaken in your heart a lively devotion towards Jesus Christ, in the most holy sacrament of the altar.

2nd POINT. Consider—this day the prophetic words of David are fulfilled: "We have received thy mercy, O God, in the midst of thy temple."* What is this mercy which we have received from God? It is Jesus Christ, who in all the actions and sufferings of his life, had no other end in view but to reconcile us with God, and draw us forth from our miseries. What title can be more justly applied to him, than that of mercy; since all that he has done and suffered for us, was due neither to our merits nor to our good works, but solely to his own charity? For as the apostle says: "When the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared; not by the works of justice which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us."† It was his infinite mercy that brought him down from heaven to be born in a stable, and to die upon a cross, and this same mercy impels him to offer himself to the Father of mercies: "that being justified by his grace, we may be heirs, according to hope of life everlasting. It is a faithful saying: and these things I will have thee affirm constantly: that they who believe in God, may be careful to excel in good works. These things are good and profitable unto men."‡ For since we have the happiness of receiving and lodging mercy itself, in the midst of our hearts, is it not just to follow its impulse? And what impulse can mercy inspire, but that which leads to

* Ps. xlvii. 10.

† Tit. iii. iv.

‡ Tit. iii. 7, 8.

the practice of good works, and particularly to fraternal charity. "Unto thee, O my helper, will I sing, for thou art God my defence: my God, my mercy."*

3rd POINT. Consider—this day is accomplished that which the Prophet Aggeus had predicted: "Great shall be the glory of this last house more than of the first."† Because the second temple is now honored by the adorable presence of Jesus Christ, and the words of David begin to be accomplished. "The Lord hath made known his salvation: he hath revealed his justice in the sight of the Gentiles."‡ "He hath remembered his mercy and his truth towards the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."§ Therefore all nations sing praises to the Lord with transports of joy, they sing Alleluias and offer hymns in his honor. Such was the thanksgivings of holy Simeon, in the name both of Jew and Gentile, when holding the Divine Infant in his arms, he exclaimed: "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace: because my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people of Israel."|| Learn, from these words, to consider our Lord in the most holy sacrament as the glory, the light and salvation of our souls; but that we may be worthy to participate in these three signal favors, let us approach him with a preparation and dispositions suitable to the sanctity of this mystery. Let us embrace the infant Jesus with all the

* Ps. lviii. 18.

* Agg. ii. 10.

† Ps. xcvi. ii.

§ Ps. xcvi. 3.

|| S. Luc. ii. 29, & seq.

tenderness and love, that the state of infancy which He has assumed for our salvation serves to inspire. In fine, let us reflect on the meekness, obedience, and humility of this amiable Saviour, and study to become like unto this little one : lest it may prove in vain for us that this great God has become the lowliest of men. Honor the Mother through whom we received him, and bless the Eternal Father who has given him for our salvation. Offer him this dear victim on the altar of your heart ; imploring by his merits the pardon of your sins, and grace to make such use of this most precious gift, that at the hour of death you may be able to say : “ Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace ;” * for my eyes shall contemplate Him in the unveiled splendor of his glory, whom I now behold by faith concealed under the sacramental species on the altar, which is the throne of thy grace and love.

THIRD OF FEBRUARY.

On the oblation of Jesus in the Temple.

1st POINT. Consider—The Son of God, at his entrance into the temple, offers to his eternal Father his body, soul, life, actions, labors, persecutions, and sufferings, his blood and death. To his divine mind all these are present, and knowing how much they would redound to the glory of his Father, he makes of them a perfect holocaust. How precious is this offering ! Never had such been presented since the formation of the world ! What a victim ! What a priest !

* Luc. ii. 29.

With what ardor should you expect the hour of prayer? With what gladness should you present yourself before God! How unreservedly should you consecrate to him your entire being! St. Gregory Nazianzen says, we lose nothing in giving all: whatever we give to God, is returned to us a hundred fold. Let us, he says, present to God our members which are on earth; let us consecrate all to his service. Let us become reasonable holocausts, and perfect victims. Let us give all to God, to the end, that he may give all things to us. Examine what you have hitherto offered, and what you will offer for the future. No longer defer to consecrate yourself to him without reserve.

2nd POINT. Consider—the Son of God offers himself with profound reverence to the Divine Majesty, which his sacred humanity regards as the source of his happiness, of whom he holds his being, life, and all the gifts of nature, grace, and glory. He also offers himself with an infinite love and zeal for the advancement of God's glory, of which he only understood the full grandeur and extent. With a sentiment of joy he beholds himself in a condition to suffer and die by obedience, in order to repair the injury offered to the God-head by our rebellious will. He presents this offering with a love the most incomprehensible, giving all and making a general renunciation of his rights to the honor and glory of his Father. Is such your disposition? In what esteem do you hold your vows? Do you observe your rules in a spirit of love? With what zeal are you animated for the glory of God? Can you say with David—"I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my vows which my lips have

uttered.....I will offer up to thee holocausts full of marrow?"* You have truly entered into the house of God with holocausts, since in presenting your vows, you have offered him all that you possessed. But how do you observe them? Are they not meagre victims, devoid of marrow and juice? That is to say, destitute of fervor, devotion, and love?

O Blessed Virgin, devoted victim of love, who hast offered thyself with thy only beloved Son, as a perfect holocaust to the divine Majesty; obtain for me a spark of that living fire of charity which it was thy inexpressible happiness to bear in thy arms, and thereby to feed the flame that burned in thy breast, to the end it may consume all that is defective in my heart, destroying every thing that belongs not to God, or tends not to his honor.

3rd POINT. Consider—the fidelity with which the Son of God will accomplish during his whole mortal life, all that he this day offers in the temple. As to the interior, his oblation will be uninterrupted; and with regard to the execution and consummation of his sacrifice, every moment of his will be a perfect holocaust. If he permits himself to be redeemed by the Blessed Virgin, it is only that he may unite the active to the contemplative, in order to procure more advantageously the glory of his heavenly Father and the salvation of mankind, and to have the opportunity of offering himself an innocent victim for the sins of the world. How do you fulfil the promise made to God

* Ps. lxx. 13, & seq.

when you consecrated yourself to his service? How unfaithful and ungenerous you are in his regard. Do you not rob him of a part of that which you have devoted to his service, that is to say, the most precious moments of your life? Should you not fear his indignation, who "hates rapine in a holocaust." Meditate these words—"After the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, they carried him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord."* Where now are your excuses, pretended exemptions, frivolous interpretations? "After the days were accomplished:" behold their exact observance of the time prescribed. Is your time well regulated? Do you not give daily proofs of inconstancy? You should endeavour equally to fulfil your duties at all times, since God is always the same. "The days of purification." All our days are days of purification. Be then careful daily to purify your soul, that it may be found stainless at the hour of death. For it is an irrevocable sentence, that nothing defiled can enter the kingdom of God. "According to the law." Are you observant of your rules and even of your least obligations? Do you not seek dispensations under pretext of age or of occupation? Do you not murmur when commanded that which seems difficult or humiliating. "Take hold of instruction, leave it not: keep it because it is thy life."† "Do ye all things without murmurings and hesitations, that you may be blameless and sincere children of God, without reproof, in the midst of a perverse generation: among whom you shine as lights in the world."‡

* St. Luc. ii. 22. † Prov. iv. 13. ‡ Phil. ii. 14, 15.

FOURTH OF FEBRUARY.

On the Blessed Virgin as our Mediatrix of intercession in the Temple.

1st POINT. Consider—Jesus enters the temple as mediator of redemption, to reconcile us with God, by the oblation of his sufferings and death, and Mary accompanies Him as mediatrix of intercession through his blood and merits. Admire the heroic devotedness with which the Blessed Virgin offers herself in union with her divine Son, as a victim to the Eternal Father, for his glory and the salvation of man. Is such the generosity with which you offer yourself for the glory of God and the accomplishment of the divine will, when an occasion of sacrifice or suffering is presented to you? Do you practise that noble lesson of generous abandonment into the hands of God, of which Mary gives you so touching an example on this occasion? Do you give its value and perfection to the sacrifice, by uniting it with that of Jesus Christ's? Alas! it is to be feared that it is only in sentiment and speculation you make such offerings, and that you shrink with horror from the chalice the moment it is presented to you. Have recourse then to that generous model and compassionate advocate, to assist you for the future by her powerful intercession when you have to encounter such trials. Address her with St. Bonaventure: O my powerful advocate, to thee do I lift up my eyes, my hope is in the virtue of thy name. Vouchsafe to direct all my actions to the end for which I have been created. Be thou blessed in heaven and on earth, in the sea and in all the depths. O Mary! through

your intercession we expect salvation, you are the door of the heavenly court. O my good, my very good and most merciful Mother, conduct me to the gate of salvation, and obtain that my name may be written amongst the elect.

2nd POINT. Consider—the dignity of Mother of God entitles the Blessed Virgin to a communication in all that belongs to her divine Son, in as much as a pure creature is capable: this derogates not from the glory of Jesus Christ, because all that she possesses she holds from him, and renders for it an eternal homage. Jesus Christ is the supreme mediator between God and man. But being God, this exalted majesty is to man an object of awe; for although he has assumed our nature, nevertheless his humanity is as it were absorbed in the glory of his divinity, not by a transformation of substance, but of sentiments and affections, so that if he seem infinitely amiable, he is not less terrible. We praise not alone his mercy; this canticle would be imperfect; we must also extol his justice. Although he has learned to compassionate our miseries by the sufferings he has endured for us as our Redeemer, yet he ceases not to be our judge. According to the holy Scripture, our God is “a devouring and consuming fire.”* Therefore shall not the sinner, who is like to straw and to the withered leaf, fear to approach him? It was necessary for our encouragement to give us an intercessor, who could by her prayers moderate the rigor of his judgments. Who can so well exercise this prerogative as his

* Deut. ix. 3.

Blessed Mother? Whose intercession is more powerful with him? or whose compassion for us can be so great? In her there is nothing austere or terrible to human frailty, she is benignity itself. O blessed for ever be He who has given to us an advocate so powerful, a refuge so unfailing, and a mother so affectionate.

3rd POINT. Consider—with what perfection the Blessed Virgin fulfils the office of intercessor, whether in offering her divine Son for the salvation of mankind, or in offering herself to all the crosses she shall have to bear during her entire life for the same end. Already she begins to feel the sorrows of Calvary; and the remainder of her life shall be a continual martyrdom. She shall suffer each moment in her heart all that Jesus is to suffer one day in his sacred body; and the now predicted death of this beloved Son, always present to her mind, shall inflict as deep a wound on her heart, as if she beheld it with her eyes. Figure to yourself two altars, says Arnaud of Chartes; on one the heart of Mary, on the other the sacred body of Jesus Christ. The Son immolates his body, the Mother immolates her heart. Her consolation would be to unite the martyrdom of the body with that of the mind, and to mingle her blood with that of the Saviour, for the redemption of mankind; but this only belongs to the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world. Her zeal, nevertheless, co-operates for our reconciliation; the Son offers to the eternal Father the vows of his mother in union with his own, the mother prays, the Son presents, and the Father grants her prayer. Thus piety, charity, and mercy mutually embrace each other—the mother supplicating, the Son presenting

his wounds, and the Father propitiously accepting these precious pledges of love. What can be learned in this school of sanctity, but meekness and mercy.

O Blessed Virgin, how powerful is thy aid for advancing our salvation ! If thou deignest to supplicate in our behalf, we need no other intercessor with thy divine Son. For thou art the moving principle of all the heavenly spirits ; thou no sooner speakest in our favor, than all the saints unite with thee, and join their prayers to thine. Speak then for us, O charitable advocate ; for if thou art silent, who shall plead our cause ? If thou dost abandon us, to whom shall we have recourse, O most holy Mother of God ? We are lost, if thou obtainest not our salvation, thou who art our refuge and our hope. For as respiration is an assured sign of the life of the body, so thy most holy name breathed from the heart and lips of thy servants, is not only a sign, but a principle of that joy, hope, and life obtained through thy intercession.

FIFTH OF FEBRUARY.

On the Blessed Virgin as our Model in the contemplative and the active Life.

1st POINT. Consider—how perfectly the Blessed Virgin fulfilled all the duties of the contemplative life. She above all pure creatures was inebriated with the abundance of the house of God. Her prayer partook more of the contemplation of the blessed, and the lights of heavenly glory, than of the obscurity of faith. Heaven was her dwelling-place, where she had cen-

tred all her thoughts and desires ; she meditated the eternal years ; for her heart was entirely separated and disengaged from things temporal and perishable. Divine truth regulated the whole tenor of her life. Her book was purity of heart. Her mirror was the Divinity itself, in which she beheld the vanity of all creatures and her own nothingness. Devotion was her ornament, for all her application was to cultivate the interior spirit. In fine, the divine union was the centre of her repose ; for God was the sole treasure of her heart. O admirable life ! Life that is a foretaste of heaven ! life of continual prayer, which no earthly object could ever interrupt !

O that this cold and sensual heart, continually filled with the images of creatures, defiled with sin, and grovelling on the earth, were made to throb and burn with thy slightest influence, how soon would it relish all the truths of eternal life, and utterly detesting this miserable world, place all its happiness in God alone !

2nd POINT. Consider—how faithfully the Blessed Virgin fulfilled all the duties of the active life. These consist in the exercise of the works of mercy, spiritual and corporal, and in the practice of all virtues. She practised the corporal works of mercy towards her beloved Son, serving him as her son and her Lord. She practised the spiritual works of mercy towards St. John, in contributing to the sanctification of his soul, and obtaining for him many graces. She united the exercise of both towards St. Elizabeth, assisting in her domestic occupations, and bearing the benediction of heaven to her house. She still daily exercises them,

towards mankind, procuring for them all benefits, spiritual and temporal, with inconceivable charity. In Mary, says St. Bernard, are united the sentiments of a compassionate, with the effective works of a beneficent charity. She provides for the necessities of all who invoke her; she is all to all; she opens her bosom of mercy to the whole world, to the end that all may receive of her plenitude grace for grace. She is the temple of mercy, open to all the miserable. All sinners find access to her, none are excluded.

O Blessed Virgin, when we speak of thy other virtues we proclaim thy praises; but when we extol thy mercy we congratulate ourselves. We admire thy humility, purity, wisdom, and all the graces of heaven, of which thou art the sanctuary. But thy mercy above all is sweet to the miserable, we embrace it with more tenderness, we remember it with more joy, we invoke it more frequently. The Lord is sweet, because he is my Lord and my mercy. Thou, O Mother of my Lord, art the royal gate of mercy, lead me to thy Son. Daughter of my Creator, conduct me to thy Father. Spouse of the Holy Ghost, present me to thy spouse.

3rd POINT. Consider—the servants of the Blessed Virgin should learn from her example to unite the duties of the active life with those of the contemplative; that is to say, to pass from contemplation to action, and from action to contemplation: imitating the angels who ascend and descend by the ladder of Jacob; to ascend towards God by the exercise of prayer, to descend towards our neighbour by the exercise of good works. Let not attachment to the repose of contemplation make you forgetful of the spiritual interests of your neigh-

bour, nor an inclination for active duties, cause you to lose affection for prayer. Enter into the tabernacle, with Moses, to treat with God : come forth from it again to treat with your neighbour, and to labor for his salvation. Say with the spouse : I sleep, and my heart watches. I so repose that I cease not to listen. I spend not my leisure in idleness, but in learning the maxims of heavenly wisdom. I quit the tumult of human affairs, to occupy myself in divine affections. But after tasting this repose, listen to the voice of the spouse, who awakes you saying : Arise beloved soul, and come. Arise from the sweet sleep of contemplation, prayer, and reading, and come quickly ; that is to say, come to the service of your neighbour by the preaching of the Gospel and the example of good works. Remember therefore, that the duties of Martha and Mary should not be separated. Mary is necessary to Martha, and Martha is praised for calling Mary to her assistance. By uniting them together you will approach unto God, which is to you the *one thing necessary*. How do we approach to God, says St. Augustin, if not by faith, by desire, and by charity ? The two precepts of charity, that is, the love of God and our neighbour, are as it were the two feet by which we must advance towards God ; beware of failing in either, which would cause you to lose him for eternity.

SIXTH OF FEBRUARY.

On Jesus curing the blind man of Bethsaida.

1st POINT. Consider—in what manner Jesus cures the blind man whom they lead to him, on entering Beth-

saida. He takes him by the hand, and leads him out of the town, he anoints his eyes with spittle, and having laid his hands on him, enquires if he saw any thing. He takes the hand of the blind man, with the same humility and charity that caused him to assume human nature in the Incarnation, and leads him by the hand as it were to conduct him towards heaven. He withdrew him from the town, because it is not in the crowd or tumult of the world that God communicates himself and operates his wonders in souls. It is in solitude he illuminates them by his divine wisdom, and gives them relish of God, and understanding and love of his grandeur and beauty. In solitude he speaks to them and asks what they see, demanding from them an account of the lights they receive, that he may bestow on them others still more perfect. Make, with St. Catherine, a closet in your heart, where you may give yourself to prayer, and conversation with God. Then you will behold the wonders of God. He will replenish you with good thoughts, which will rejoice your mind and dilate your heart. Whoever desires to obtain his cure must first separate himself from idle and unquiet thoughts, irregular actions, vain and useless discourse, which dissipate the mind on exterior objects.

2nd POINT. Consider—the Son of God having asked the blind man if he saw any thing, he replied: “I see men as it were trees, walking.”* Such is the general state of mankind during this life: we have only an obscure and confused view, which makes objects appear what they are not in reality. Honors, pleasures, and riches, seem to us great and desirable, although they are

* St. Mark, viii. 24.

truly most vile and contemptible. On the contrary, humiliations, sufferings, and afflictions, bear a melancholy and terrifying aspect, though when viewed in the spirit of Jesus Christ, they become amiable and precious. Thus we see not *that which is*, because we rest too much on a delusive appearance, and we shall always remain in the blindness of error, until Jesus Christ shall lay his hand on our eyes, as he did to the blind man, and then our interior vision being perfectly restored, we shall see all things as he did, clearly and distinctly. Learn hence that God ordinarily acts in our regard according to the disposition of our hearts. If the preparation of our hearts is generous, he produces great effects; if it is mean and contracted, he operates but little; hence comes the feint lights which so many receive in their ordinary devotions, in consequence of the little diligence and fervor which they bring—a defect which stops the course of God's graces, and prevents him from acting with all the liberality he would have done, if we opposed not his merciful designs.

3rd POINT. Consider—the command given by the Son of God to the blind man after having restored him to sight, “Go into thy house, and if thou enter into the town, tell nobody.”* Learn that the graces of God are increased by the same means from which they derive their beginning. A soul that has been enlightened in retreat, should carefully exclude all idle thoughts, and shun all that could lead to dissipation of mind. She should preserve recollection, in order to contemplate Him who has restored her to sight, and endeavour to see all things clearly, that is to say, the past, the pre-

* St. Mark, viii. 26.

sent, and the future. She should meditate attentively on what God has done for her in the past, the mercy he exercises towards her at the present, and the exact account he will demand of her in the future. She should examine what she has been, what she is, and what she shall be hereafter. She should reflect on the years she has passed, look forward to eternity which awaits her, and seize on the present opportunity which alone is in her power. This is to see all things clearly, penetrating them with the vision of faith, not with the imperfect light of the senses, which mistakes the shadow for the body, and appearance for reality.

SEVENTH OF FEBRUARY.

On Jesus enquiring of his Disciples what men said of Him.

1st POINT. Consider—the question which our Lord puts to his apostles, and their reply. “As he was alone praying, his disciples also were with him: and he asked them, saying: Whom do the people say that I am?” He well knew what men thought of him, but he would thus draw from his apostles a profession of their faith. He requires not what the Pharisees, or the great ones of the world say of him; because these were blinded by the hatred and envy they bore him, and these were too much attached to earthly things to care for those of heaven. But the people were more upright in their sentiments, and less biased by passion, nevertheless how far they were still removed from that esteem in which they ought to have held Jesus Christ! How do the apostles reply to the question of their master?

"But they answered, and said: John the Baptist: but some say Elias; and others say that one of the former prophets is risen again."* Be astonished at the ignorance of men, who judge so erroneously in what regards God and their salvation. Admire the charity of the Son of God, and the care he takes to instruct his apostles, and elevate their minds to a knowledge of heavenly truths, both by conversation and by the prayers he pours forth to obtain for them divine lights. Imitate the humility and meekness he manifests on this occasion, in supporting with patience the little esteem in which he was held by men. Learn with what intention you should enquire what men say of you, not that you may hear your praises, but that you may know and correct your defects. Study to become all to all, to please all according to God. If you cannot content men, suffer meekly their vain discourse, their false reports, and sinister judgments, employing no other defence than humility and silence, remembering those words: "For how much each one is in thy eyes, so much he is, and no more."†

2nd POINT. Consider—again our Lord demands of his disciples: "But whom do you say that I am?"‡ And Simon Peter answering said—"the Christ of God."§ This admirable confession of faith was an effect of the prayer that Jesus Christ had just offered, which, St. Luke says, obtained for them all, and principally for St. Peter, a supernatural light, by which they understood more clearly than before, that he whom they saw a passable and mortal man, was at the same time

* St. Luke, ix. 19.

† Imitat. b. iii. 50.

‡ St. Luc. ix. 20.

§ Ibid.

truly the Son of God, equal to his Father in all things. Therefore our Lord replies to St. Peter—"Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona: because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven."* Reflect that the faith you received in baptism was a special favor of God, merited for you by Jesus Christ, and that it opens to you an infinite treasure of heavenly gifts, amongst which is the glorious title of *child of God*. How happy to receive by faith and divine revelation, a grace which gives you a Father in heaven who is God. How admirable, O Lord, are the lights you impart to your creatures, whether they regard the mysteries to be believed, or the morality to be practised! A Man-God; a man born of a virgin; one God in three persons; a God expiring on a cross. O wonderful mysteries! To love our enemies; do good to those who injure us, rejoice in afflictions, hate and renounce ourselves. O admirable morality! Who could believe this, if a God had not taught it? "Thy testimonies are exceedingly credible."† As the lights and maxims of faith elevate us to a divine excellence, so the sentiments of corrupt nature level us to the rank of beasts. This lively faith and sublime knowledge of the divinity of Jesus Christ, was in the apostles the foundation of their sanctity, and the love they bore their divine Master. Such should also be the foundation of your perfection, and of all your hopes in the life to come.

3rd POINT. Consider—the promises by which our Lord recompenses the faith of St. Peter. "And I say to thee: that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will

* St. Math. xvi. 17.

† Ps. xcii. 5.

build my church.”* Faith in Jesus Christ is the foundation of his church: St. Peter is the first stone that Jesus Christ lays in this foundation. He destines him with his successors, to be the visible head of his kingdom on earth even to the end of the world. He promises to his faith that priority which he gives to his love after the resurrection. Peter is therefore the father of the faithful in the law of grace, as Abraham formerly was under the ancient law. Those then who would secure their salvation must adhere to his faith, and that of his successors, because it is immoveable. “Jesus Christ,” says St. Cyril, “in giving him the name of Peter, would signify that he built his church on him as on a firm rock.” “And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”† By the gates are understood the strength of hell, which are the demons and their auxiliaries, that is to say, sinners and sin itself, which draw souls into hell, and in this consists its strength. But in vain shall this infernal force assail the rock of Peter, for “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” “If the enemies of the church,” says St. Prosper, “attack her by persecution, they exercise her patience; if they attack her by heresy, they exercise her wisdom; in fine, in whatever manner they assault her, they give her the opportunity of exercising, but can never exhaust, her charity. Bless the divine Providence that preserves to us this asylum of salvation even to the consummation of ages. Be assured that if you are faithful to God, all the power of hell cannot prevail against you, or make void the promises and designs of God in your regard: “And I

* St. Matt. xvi. 18.

† St. Matt. xvi. 18.

will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven—and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.”* The eternal Father has given to his Son the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the Son confides them to St. Peter, with absolute power to govern his church, to bind and unbind, to condemn and absolve under his authority, without appeal. Bless God, who has left in his church the power of forgiving sins, and of opening to you the gates of his heavenly kingdom; but remember, that if they are not opened before death, they must remain closed against you for eternity.

EIGHTH OF FEBRUARY.

On Jesus predicting his death.

1st POINT. Consider—“From that time Jesus began to shew to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the ancients, and scribes, and chief priests, and be put to death, and the third day rise again.”† Jesus discovers the secret of his death only to his chosen friends; moreover, he discovers it not until he has proved and fortified their faith, as he did that of his apostles, whom he elevated to the knowledge of his greatness before predicting his death, and discovering to them the value and happiness of his sufferings. On those only who are chosen among thousands this favor is conferred. “For this man is to me a vessel of election, to carry my name

* St. Matt. xvi. 19.

† St. Matt. xvi. 21.

before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name sake."* I will teach him by experience the sublime knowledge of the cross. "In the cross is salvation: in the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness: in the cross is strength of mind: in the cross is joy of spirit. Behold the cross is all, and in dying to thyself all consists: and there is no other way to life, and to true internal peace, but the way of the holy cross, and of daily mortification. If thou carry the cross willingly, it will carry thee, and bring thee to thy desired end; to wit, to that place where there will be an end of suffering, though here there will be no end."†

2nd POINT. Consider—this lesson is so elevated, that St. Peter himself could not understand it, even after having penetrated the secret of his master's divinity. For he drew him aside and lovingly reprov'd him, saying—"Lord, be it far from thee, this shall not be unto thee."‡ O weakness of the human heart! Though you are at times elevated to a high degree of prayer and to sublime sentiments of the majesty of God, humble yourself profoundly; for after the movements of grace, those of flesh and blood will not fail to attack, and cause you to fall, if not on your own guard; for "nature is crafty and draws away many, ensnares them, and deceives them, and always intends herself for her end. But grace walks with simplicity, declines from all appearance of evil, offers no deceits, and does all things purely for God, in whom also she rests as in

* Acts, ix, 15, 16. † Imit. b. ii. c. 12. ‡ St. Matt. xvi. 23.

her last end. Grace studies the mortification of her own self, resists sensuality, seeks to be subject, covets to be overcome, aims not at following her own liberty, loves to be kept under discipline, and desires not to have the command over any one; but under God ever to live and be; and for God's sake is ever ready humbly to bow down herself under all human creatures."*

3rd POINT. Consider—the fault of St. Peter proceeded only from a natural tenderness towards his divine Master, which caused him to believe that the ignominy of the cross was contrary to the dignity of Jesus Christ; and nevertheless, reflect on the severity with which the Son of God replies—"But he turning, said to Peter—'Go after me, satan, thou art a scandal unto me: because thou dost not relish the things that are of God, but the things that are of men.'"[†] How precious is the cross in the eyes of God, since he treats as satan him that would oppose his sufferings! Fly the sentiments of men: they are opposed to those of God. If you fear the cross, if you consider him a friend who would dissuade you from it, you relish not the things that are of God, you have not the spirit of Jesus Christ. Meditate the words of the apostle: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world. And whosoever shall follow this rule, peace be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. Let no man from henceforth be troublesome to me: for I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body."[‡]

* Imitat. b. iii. 54. † St. Matt. xvi. 23. ‡ Gal. vi. 14, & seq.

Pour forth on me, O Lord, the unction of thy holy grace, that fortified by the consideration of thy rewards, the example of thy saints, above all, that of our great model and instructor Jesus Christ, I may henceforth rejoice in sufferings, to the end that having suffered for my Divine Master, and having expired with him on the cross, thou mayest be mercifully pleased to receive me into the mansions of the blessed.

NINTH OF FEBRUARY.

On the Exhortation of Jesus to Mortification and Sufferings.

1st POINT. Consider—"And calling together the multitude, with his disciples, he said to them: If any man will follow me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."* Jesus having severely reprehended St. Peter, assembled the people together with his disciples, not to declare to them openly the secret of his death, but to propose three important maxims conformable to that mystery, which are three degrees that lead to the summit of the cross, and are necessary for all those who adore a crucified God. The first maxim is: "If any man will follow me, let him deny himself." He says, if any man *will*; for he constrains us not to enter into his kingdom; no one is forced to receive a benefit, as it would then be no longer a grace. It is in your own power either to follow or not to follow his call; but if you will follow it, you must necessarily renounce all that is exterior,

* S. Mark, viii. 34.

as parents, friends, pleasures, honors, and all that leads to sin. You must also renounce all that is interior, as your will, your judgment, and all your irregular inclinations. You must even renounce your life, and be ready at all times to lay it down if necessary for the divine service. Is such your disposition? Do you sincerely renounce all these things? Do you not flatter yourself with an apparent and superficial abnegation? That which we absolutely renounce we fly with aversion, and cannot endure to behold. That which you still love, and to the loss of which you are still sensible, has not been sincerely renounced.

2nd POINT. Consider—the second maxim: “If any man will follow me, let him take up his cross.” It is not to abstain from all that is or may be evil: you must moreover embrace all that is or may be good. Our will has two principles of action: the one of flight and aversion; the other of love, complaisance, desire, and pursuit: the Son of God is not satisfied with the first, he also requires the second; and as in this second the most excellent degree is the love of contempt, sufferings, and martyrdom, whether exterior by the destruction of the body, or interior by the mortification of the passions and vicious inclinations, this is what he demands above all, and what he designates by the word *cross*, which was a torment at once cruel and infamous, but which he has rendered precious and honorable by embracing it for us. If then we would follow Him, we must necessarily suffer with him, after him, and for his sake. That man, says St. Leo, tends to Jesus Christ, by the way he himself has chosen, who endeavours to walk in the road of humiliation and suf-

fering ; a road in which many labors and sorrows are to be encountered, many difficulties to be overcome.

My God, my Lord, and my King, wherever thou art, my sovereign Master, I will remain inseparably united to thee. Nothing shall separate me from thee. Such should be your resolution when meditating on Jesus crucified, remembering that you follow him under the standard of the cross. Suffer therefore with patience whilst engaged in the combat; joy shall succeed to labor; and if you partake in the cross of Jesus Christ, you shall also partake of his crown.

3rd POINT. Consider—the third maxim: “If any man will follow me, let him take up his cross and follow me.” It does not suffice to bear the cross, for it is the allotted portion of all men; but how few there are who bear it profitably. To bear the cross with merit, we must bear it for the sake of Jesus Christ, and with his spirit. The love of Jesus is the sword of grief, which carries patience to the soul which it pierces. Whatever you endure, remember that Jesus Christ has suffered before you. “O Lord,” said David, “when my heart was in anguish, thou didst exalt me on a rock. Thou hast conducted me; for thou hast been my hope, a tower of strength against the face of the enemy.”* Jesus Christ is this tower of defence against our enemies. Lest you should be wounded by your enemy, fly into the tower. How shall you flee into it? You have it before you: remember Jesus Christ, enter into this tower, hide yourself in his sacred wounds,

* Ps. lx. 3, 4.

you shall there be in security. "For he hath hidden me in his tabernacle; in the day of evils, he hath protected me in the secret place of his tabernacle. He exalted me upon a rock, and now he hath lifted up my head above my enemies. I have gone round, and have offered up in his tabernacle a sacrifice of jubilation. I will sing, and recite a psalm to the Lord. Hear, O Lord, my voice, with which I have cried to thee: have mercy on me, and hear me. My heart hath said to thee: my face hath sought thee: thy face, O Lord, will I still seek. Turn not away thy face from me; decline not in thy wrath from thy servant. Be thou my helper, forsake me not; do not thou despise me, O God my Saviour."*

TENTH OF FEBRUARY.

On the Exhortation of Jesus to all Men to walk in the way of the Cross.

1st POINT. Consider—"For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel, shall save it."† The first motive which Jesus Christ proposes to lead us to a love of the cross, is, that a sensual life causes eternal death to the soul; and that the mortification of the irregular appetites and passions ensures eternal life. The soul is at liberty to choose either a life that is natural and according to the senses, or a life that is supernatural and divine. Whoever makes choice of one, must renounce the other. Either the cross with eternal life,

* Ps. xxvi. 6, & seq.

† St. Marc. viii. 35.

or eternal death with the indulgence of the senses; choose which you will. And can you make a difficulty of suffering and bearing your cross after Jesus Christ? This is your vocation, says the chief of the apostles; you are called to the cross. In what path has the Son of God trodden in the course of his mortal life? That of voluntary poverty, ignominy, and pain. Behold the way which he has traced for you. Behold the cross which he would have you carry daily. If you fear contempt, there is honor in following him even unto ignominy; if you fear suffering, there is pleasure in participating in his pains.

2nd POINT. Consider—the second motive is the excellence and value of the soul, which is inestimable. “What will it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* At present you can offer your tears and alms-deeds as the price of its ransom; but when it shall have quitted the body, there is no longer a resource; its loss is irreparable. Ah! how many are there who exchange for a trifle that soul which Jesus Christ has purchased at so dear a rate! How many sell for a vile gratification the soul redeemed by the blood of a God-man. The entire world is not equal in value to an immortal soul. Why has God created the world? For the temporal use of man. For what end has he created man? For his own glory. Consequently we are obliged to watch vigilantly over our own souls, that we may be able to restore them to their Creator pure and spotless at the hour of

* S. Matt. xvi. 26.

death. By how many titles is the soul of man consecrated to his God? It is his throne, his temple, his inheritance, and his treasure, in which he has placed his heart and his delights. "O Father of mercies! Father of the poor! What is man, that thou placest thy heart on him?" Ah! methinks I now comprehend the reason of all these favors, it is because where thy treasure is, there also is thy heart.

3rd POINT. Consider—the third motive contained in these words; "For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he will render to every man according to his works."* And to the end you may be assured of this, "Amen I say to you, there are some of them standing here, who shall not taste death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."† He speaks here of his transfiguration, which occurred six days after, wherein he displayed a ray of that beatitude which follows the cross, and the glory of his resurrection and ascension, when his disciples also commenced to taste the fruits of his passion. But this, nevertheless, was no more than a passing gleam of that glory, which at the day of judgment he will communicate to those who have loved and followed the cross. What shall be the joy of those generous conquerors of the world and the flesh? What the confusion of carnal men, who live the life of beasts? Do you fear death? reflect on the glory of him who shall triumph. Do you apprehend the cross? consider the estimation in which it is held by the angels. Jesus Christ will render to every one according to their me-

* St. Matt. xvi. 27.

† St. Matt. xvi. 28.

rits. He makes no distinction between the poor and the rich. He values not the persons but the works. Then shall the mortification of the flesh be more glorious, than if it had been pampered with delights. Then the coarse clothing shall seem beautiful, and the costly garment mean and loathsome. Then the poor cottage shall be more esteemed than the gilded palace. Then a pure conscience shall give more joy than learned philosophy. Then the contempt of riches shall outweigh all the treasures of the earth. Then an austere life, and severe penance, shall be more agreeable than all the pleasures of the earth. "Learn now to suffer in little things, that hereafter you may avoid what is great."*

O Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead ! remember thou art also our Saviour : if our sins have provoked thy justice, thy own wounds plead in our behalf. Look then upon the wounds thou hast suffered, and the blood thou hast shed to efface our sins. We beseech thee by those precious pledges of salvation, to pardon our sins, and impart to our hearts the true spirit of penance.

ELEVENTH OF FEBRUARY.

On the reasons why Jesus chose the Cross.

1st POINT. Consider—"And they spoke of his decease that he should accomplish in Jerusalem."† The first reason that justifies the proceeding of God towards his elect, in predestinating them to the cross, and

* Imitat. b. 24.

† St. Luc. ix: 39:

which manifests the excess of his love towards them, is taken from the debt which they owed to his justice. For man having sinned as did the angels, deserved like them to be condemned to eternal fire, if the Saviour of the world had not changed, by his infinite mercy and the merit of his death, this miserable eternity into momentary sufferings, as the apostle says. Should we not hold this disposition as a singular favor, adore the sovereign goodness of God, submit to the sentence with humble acknowledgement, and accept willingly the crosses of this life, in order to avoid everlasting torments? If you seriously reflect on this reason, and if you conceive what it is to be condemned to eternal flames, you will never complain of the transitory sufferings of the present time.

2nd POINT. Consider—the second reason is founded on divine love, which is in one respect the life of the soul, and in another, the principal tribute that God requires from us. Herein the goodness of God is admirable, who demands from us only that which we can possess by his grace, and which we can return to him with sensible pleasure and sweetness. For what can be more sweet than to love, or more reasonable than to love our sovereign good? Now, love is never more strongly demonstrated than by suffering for him whom we love. It is easy to love God when he replenishes us with favors and graces; but when he sends us the cross, it is then we can prove whether we love him or not. Thus our Saviour entering into the world, and desiring to testify his love towards his Father and his brethren, has preferred the cross to an infinity of other means much less painful: requiring therefore of us a

reciprocal love, should he not present to us the cross, which is the most sensible mark of the love he bears us, and of that which we should return for his goodness. O christian soul, remember that your divine spouse would prove by his sufferings the intensity of his love. His appearance in glory on Thabor was but momentary, yet even in that moment he spoke but of his death ; he bore the cross his entire life, from the stable of Bethlehem unto Calvary : should you love him with any other love ? Was it not such a love that impelled St. Ignatius the martyr to conjure all creatures, even savage beasts, to torment and tear him, because by suffering alone he desired to manifest the love he bore to Jesus Christ ? Was it not the same that drew from others these ardent exclamations : “ Either to suffer or to die. Either the cross, or the stroke of death ; for I cannot live, unless to suffer ; I cannot remain without a wound, seeing thee wounded and torn on the cross.”

3rd POINT. Consider—the third reason is taken from our spiritual maladies, the source of which is self-love, an evil so universal that no one can claim exemption, so obstinate that nothing less than extreme violence and the severest treatment can effect its cure. What then should a charitable physician do who loves the salvation of his patients, but to dispense unto them sufferings, as salutary remedies for the present, and preservations for the future, especially against pride, an enemy so formidable that it causes the greatest saints to tremble ? For there is no means more powerful than affliction and suffering to humble the proud. Affliction is the stone that beats down this giant, and delivers us from a most dangerous enemy ; which cast

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the angels from heaven and man from paradise. The fourth reason is taken from the example of Jesus Christ. For if the Son of God, who is the increated wisdom, has chosen for himself the way of the cross whereby to enter into his glory, can we doubt that it is the most advantageous for us? Has he not placed all our spiritual good in the cross? "Salvation is in the cross, life is in the cross; in the cross is salvation from our enemies, the unction of grace, the strength of the soul, the joy of the spirit, the perfection of virtue, and the highest degree of sanctity."* But although all these advantages were not to be found in the way of the cross, and that by walking in one less difficult, we should arrive at an equal glory in heaven, yet this sole consideration, that Jesus Christ has trodden the thorny path of suffering, should oblige us to prefer the same, to the end we may be more assimilated to our Divine Head. This resemblance is the most signal honor and advantage which his love can confer upon us. "Take up your cross therefore, and follow Jesus that you may live with him eternally. He is gone before thee, carrying his cross; and he died for thee upon the cross, that thou mayest also bear thy cross, and love to die on the cross."†

* Imit. b. ii. 12.

† Imit. ii. 12.

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